



Barry, Monica and Weaver, Elizabeth and Liddle, Mark and Schmidt, Bethany and Maruna, Shadd and Meek, Rosie and Renshaw, Judy (2016) Evaluation of the User Voice Prison and Community Councils : Final Report. [Report] ,

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Evaluation of the User Voice Prison and Community Councils

Final Report

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and

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**with Shadd Maruna, Rosie Meek
and Judy Renshaw**

April 2016

FOREWORD BY SHADD MARUNA

The criminal justice system has numerous, competing goals, ranging from punishment to restitution, but one of the stated aims is to help prisoners turn their lives around and lead law-abiding lives. Considering the backgrounds that led many of them to prison in the first place and the stigma inherent in the process of incarceration, this process (called “desistance from crime” by academics) is anything but easy.

Indeed, in no other aspect of life do we expect individuals to do what we expect ex-prisoners to do. No one expects someone to become a plumber without gaining some training, without some interaction with other plumbers. No one expects a person to just become a doctor or a football player or a computer programmer on one’s own. To learn these roles, people need role models to teach us the tricks of the trade and guide us through the difficult transition involved.

For some reason, however, we expect prisoners to know how to become successful ex-prisoners “on their own” without exposing them to clear role models or mentors on this difficult journey. We may offer education, job training or therapeutic interactions in our prisons (although never enough), but little of this involves actual practice in the work of desistance or self-management. Indeed, for the most part, the prison experience is one of consistently removing a person’s responsibilities, social attachments and exposures to life in the real world.

It is for this reason that the premise behind the User Voice model (“Only offenders can stop offending”) is so compelling and incontrovertible. As an ex-prisoner once told me, desistance from crime is like a mine field, and the only safe way to get through a mine field is to walk in the footsteps of the person in front of you who made it out alive. User Voice understands this process intuitively in its work drawing on ex-prisoner leadership and peer-led mutual support.

Perhaps the most creative and important aspects of the work of User Voice are the models for Prison and Community Councils. These formalised structures for the facilitation of dialogue between service users and prison or community-based criminal justice management about issues of collective concern are rehabilitative in the best sense of the word. Unlike other rehabilitative interventions, Council participation is genuinely ‘strength-based’ as opposed to focusing endlessly on targeting individuals’ deficits. Councils ask prisoners and probationers not to be passively “corrected” through treatment, but rather to exercise their own initiative, learning responsibility and leadership skills in an empowering and stigma-countering role.

The following report from a team of researchers from the University of Strathclyde, ARCS and the University of Cambridge (with consultation from some other leading criminologists working in this area, myself included) represents the first, large-scale independent, external evaluation of the User Voice Prison and Community Councils. As such, although preliminary in its findings, the Report represents a crucial next stage in the development of User Voice’s

work. The goal of the Councils is to help create a culture or subculture supportive of the rehabilitative ideal. Although extremely noble, such a goal is also abstract and inherently difficult to measure concretely. So, the aim of the research was to determine the impact of these Councils on individual participants and on the services themselves as well as the wider social environment to the extent possible utilising the limited tools available to social science.

In this regard, the Report's findings are encouraging to say the least, but also highlight the delicate line that User Voice needs to walk with this important work. Based on a large number of interviews with Council participants, prison and community-based staff and management, a survey of prisoners and probationers, a preliminary cost-benefit assessment and other methodological innovations, the Report outlines evidence that the Councils have increased the effectiveness and efficiency of the rehabilitative regimes inside and outside prison. Far more importantly, however, the Report also evidences increases in the levels of perceived legitimacy, trust, and respect between criminal justice personnel and the individuals they are meant to govern.

Such findings are tremendously important. Researchers have long argued that the imprisonment process would largely be impossible without some level of cooperation and perceived legitimacy on the parts of those being imprisoned. Yet this is particularly true if the goal is rehabilitation, a difficult process in the best of circumstances, but certainly impossible to achieve in institutions where the rehabilitatees have no respect for the rehabilitators. To create a genuine rehabilitative subculture as can be found in some addiction recovery communities and elsewhere, staff and clients need to believe in the same goals, trust each other intuitively, recognise each other's shared humanity, and work together in achieving rehabilitative ends. The evidence of this Report suggests that the User Voice Councils are an important step toward creating such an environment supportive of change even inside total institutions like prisons.

Is there work still to be done and lessons to be learned regarding the delivery of this vision? Unquestionably – otherwise, there would be no point in commissioning research like this. Improvement is always possible, but only likely when an organisation is willing to constantly question its accepted practices, and learn from mistakes. In particular, this Report suggests that User Voice Councils face a delicate task in terms of working with penal institutions and actors. If this engagement is too comfortable or too close, the councils can lose perceived legitimacy in the eyes of prisoners and potential participants. On the other hand, if Councils are too confrontational, they risk alienating prison and community staff and management, potentially generating resistance and resentment and undermining the very potential of the Councils to create mutual trusts. Subtle evidence of both types of risks can be found in this Report, and it is clear that the Councils need to tread carefully going forward in this regard, in order to thrive.

As a side note, members of the interdisciplinary research team that undertook this difficult work have very appropriately been involved in some of the most important UK based research on “co-producing” desistance from crime (see e.g., Barry, 2010; Weaver, 2015). The idea behind this important research is that individuals do not desist “on their own” despite the individualising rhetoric of the criminal justice system into individual “successes” and “failures”. Rather, desistance is understood more collectively as involving family, friends, communities, and ultimately all of us in interlocking webs and networks. If a medical

metaphor is necessary, then the promotion of desistance requires less by way of a pharmaceutical “treatment” model than it does an epidemiological or public health approach. Desistance, like offending itself, “spreads” throughout a family, a community, a prison or indeed a society, and the goal of policy should be to promote and support these benign contagion effects.

Partnerships such as those initiated by User Voice Councils do this important work by modelling and engaging individuals in the hard work required for successful reintegration against considerable odds for those coming out of prison. I hope they spread like wildfire throughout the justice system.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shadd Maruna', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Shadd Maruna, Dean, Rutgers School of Criminal Justice
Consultant

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation team would like to express our thanks to all those who took time to give us their feedback during the research, by being involved in interviews, questionnaire completion or discussion groups. That feedback was greatly appreciated, and we learned a great deal of value from it which we hope is reflected in this report.

In particular, we are very grateful to User Voice participants, key staff at User Voice prisons and CRCs, and to User Voice staff members who provided us with consistent and positive support throughout the work.

We are also grateful to data providers who held discussions with us or helped the team to gain access to key information or data, and in particular, to staff members at the NOMS Performance Hub and at local prison and CRC offices who responded to our queries.

Many thanks also to other researchers and consultants who provided us with key assistance during the work, and who commented on particular findings or on the methods that we used. In addition to key inputs throughout the work from Shadd Maruna, Rosie Meek and Judy Renshaw, we are grateful for support provided by Prof Neal Hazel (who provided key assistance with some of the quantitative data analysis) Prof Mike Maguire (who provided us with detailed feedback about evaluation design and data sources), and Dr Celia Taylor (who provided us with key advice concerning the analysis of quantitative datasets).

From ARCS, Helen Shaw liaised with data providers and provided valuable assistance with IOMI data entry and maintenance of the IOMI database, Grainne Gordon assisted in the analysis of quantitative datasets including the final IOMI dataset, and Nick Gornall led on the design of various drafts of the User Voice online database.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

- Prison and Community Councils offered a formalised structure to facilitate dialogue between service users and prison/Community Rehabilitation Company CRC management about issues of collective concern;
- There was unanimous support for this unique model of Councils which could improve the effectiveness and efficiency of services, develop personal and social skills, and enhance feelings of trust and respect between service users and those tasked with their care or rehabilitation;
- Being user-led and independent from service provision is central to User Voice councils being credible, legitimate and able to hold service providers to account;
- There was a general concern that Councils, and indeed User Voice more widely, could and should be more flexible in aims and scope so as to appeal to the rapidly changing settings and contexts within which prisons and CRCs currently operate;
- There were mixed feelings about the level and intensity of involvement required by practitioners (prison officers and offender managers) within Councils, but their current lack of involvement hinders ‘buy in’ and understanding of the role of Councils to their work;
- Linked to the finding above, the majority of respondents suggested practitioners were at best ignorant of, and at worst resistant to the work of the Councils, but that better engagement by User Voice staff with these practitioners would enhance its credibility and sustainability within such traditionally hierarchical environments;
- Motivation by service users in Prison Councils was driven by altruistic or moral concerns and a sense of belonging, whereas motivation by service users in Community Councils was more related to generativity and a sense of self-determination. ‘Leaving a legacy’ and making a difference were implied in the vast majority of responses from participants about the purpose and value of Council membership;
- The evaluation uncovered strong evidence that User Voice activities are highly cost-effective – indeed, these activities generate a range of cost-able benefits in relation to service provision and individual change among participants, which taken together far outstrip monthly and annual running costs of User Voice.

INTRODUCTION

User Voice commissioned Monica Barry and Beth Weaver of the University of Strathclyde – in association with Mark Liddle, ARCS Ltd, Bethany Schmidt, University of Cambridge, and with input from Shadd Maruna, Rosie Meek, and Judy Renshaw - to assess the implementation, operation and short-term outcomes of the Council model of prisoner/service user participation/integration. These Prison and Community Councils were located in six prisons and three CRC areas across England, namely HM Prisons Durham and Northumberland and the Northumbria CRC; HM Prisons Oakwood and Birmingham and the Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC; and HM Prisons Wormwood Scrubs and Pentonville and the London CRC. These sites were at different stages of implementing Councils; some Prison Councils had only been operating for months whereas others had been operating for four or more years, and

the Community Councils had been operating for between a year and five years. These differences in stages of implementation - influenced as they were by the effects of systemic, organisational and operational changes heralded by the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda - necessarily affected the progression of the Council model and at the time of writing, the 'Through-The-Gate' approach to offer continuity between Prison and Community council membership had not been fully implemented.

The research had five objectives:

1. to evaluate the effectiveness of the Councils in addressing the outcomes and goals delineated in the Theory of Change and participant journey;
2. to evaluate the success of the Councils in meeting commissioners' objectives and priorities;
3. to identify consistent and rigorous data collection methods across the projects and across time which can measure performance, impacts and outcomes as outlined in the Theory of Change;
4. to evaluate the Council model and operational and administrative processes used; and
5. to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the pilots, in order to assess their ability to offer added value and efficiency to prisoner engagement and community reintegration.

A total of 235 initial and follow-up questionnaires and 301 initial and follow-up Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instruments (IOMIs) were completed by Council participants. These questionnaires, administered at regular intervals, sought scaled and open answers to questions around demographics, motivation to participate in Councils and levels of skills and personal development. The sample consisted of mainly white males in the 25-45 age group.

Thirty four interviews were conducted with Council members and a further 34 interviews were conducted with User Voice, prison and CRC staff and senior managers. These interviews focused on the development and implementation of the Councils; areas of continuity and change in the operation and administration of the Councils; perceptions of the purpose and impacts of the Council activities; any barriers to effectiveness; and future aspirations for the Councils.

THE IMPACT OF COUNCILS ON PARTICIPANTS

All participants spoke very positively about the effectiveness of the Councils in building their personal and social skills, for example increasing confidence and self esteem as well as improving their skills at communication and problem solving. Many participants were skilled individuals in their own right before becoming involved in the criminal justice system, and indeed these skills and aptitudes may well have encouraged service users to link up with a Council whilst in prison or on supervision in the community. However, there is evidence that they perceived *improvements* in their abilities to negotiate with managers, to have a meaningful voice in influencing policy and practice within prisons/CRCs, to be able to help others going through the criminal justice system and to be motivated by seeing others improve their life chances following prison or community sentences.

The cost-benefit dimensions for User Voice impacts on individual participants were more difficult to quantify using the available data, but the interview feedback and the case study work in particular suggested positive (cost-able) impacts on areas such as offending and involvement in the criminal justice system, and on practical issues such as employment, substance misuse, and health.

THE IMPACT OF COUNCILS ON POLICY AND PRACTICE

Impacts of User Voice Councils on services, regimes and practices were widely recognised as being positive. The qualitative data revealed a range of operational outcomes associated directly with the User Voice Councils which ranged from, for example, the provision of in-cell phones in prison and improved provision and distribution of clothing to prisoners, to changes to waiting rooms and waiting times in CRC offices and improvements to induction processes for those on supervision in the community.

The Councils were also deemed to contribute to a reduction in perceived barriers between professionals and prisoners/service users and indeed to improved worker/service user relationships, including a more participatory approach towards service design, development and delivery. The activities of the Councils also led to an improved quality of life and/or experience of services for prisoners and service users which also had the effect, in prisons at least, of creating the space for prison officers to work more proactively rather than reactively with prisoners.

The findings from the evaluation also suggest that User Voice Councils have a positive impact on the manageability and perceived legitimacy of prison regimes, as well as reductions in problematic incidents/events in both prison and community settings. User Voice prisons have much more positive performance than comparator prisons in relation to levels of prisoner complaints for example, and in relation to changes in levels of adjudications, the analysis suggests that User Voice activity is associated with benefits of £535,999 across the five User Voice prisons where the team was able to undertake before and after rate comparisons (with comparators, during periods of User Voice operation).

Similar differences were identified in relation to assaults on staff - if User Voice prisons had all performed in the way that their comparators had during the periods of interest, a further 480 assaults on staff would have taken place than actually did.

There was also a perceived move away from mere 'top down' consultation to a more inclusive 'bottom up', co-productive approach to improving services and resolving disputes between management and service users. This was particularly welcomed in the current era of rapid change resulting from the Transforming Rehabilitation initiative and in a climate of increased cuts to prison and CRC/probation budgets.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the difficulties in 'pinning down' cause and effect in evaluations of interventions which focus on individual and 'soft' perceptions of change, this particular evaluation was overwhelmingly positive about the philosophy, practice and outcomes of User Voice

Councils. The ‘value added’ of such Councils is demonstrated by direct user engagement (of both staff and Council members), its credibility with both service users and senior managers alike, its independence from statutory providers and its ability to hold such providers to account as well as to collaborate with them on negotiating improved outcomes and aspirations for service users.

The full report:
Evaluation of the User Voice Prison and Community Councils
can be obtained from:
User Voice, 20 Newburn Street, London SE11 5PJ Tel: 020 3137 7471

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

I thought I'd always have a label, but I've been able to have a choice and a voice.

User Voice was established in 2009 as a user-led charitable organisation whose aim is to 'foster dialogue between service providers and users that is mutually beneficial and results in better and more cost-effective services' (User Voice, 2012). Although a relatively new organisation, it has grown considerably in the last seven years, with a staff complement of 50 (including some part time staff) and over 85 per cent of its staff are people with convictions or 'ex-offenders'. User Voice is the only user led organisation that works with and for marginalised individuals to enable their voices to be heard which, as this evaluation revealed, is of significant value to a range of stakeholders. Not only does User Voice offer consultancy and advocacy in designing and implementing projects to support vulnerable groups, it also sets up and runs Prison and Community Councils in order to foster more meaningful dialogue between service users and service providers so as to encourage changes to policy and practice which are agreed by and mutually beneficial to all stakeholders.

1.1 LAYOUT OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 describes the evaluation's aims and objectives and outlines the methods used in the evaluation. Chapter 3 explores the process of the User Voice Council model's implementation and development whilst Chapters 4 and 5 present findings concerning individual impacts and impacts on services respectively, drawing closely on the outcomes described in the Theory of Change. Chapter 6 concludes the report by looking at the key themes emerging from the findings, notably in respect of the impacts on service users and service provision, and offers a discussion of the added value of User Voice and any potential threats to its future sustainability. This concluding chapter also offers some recommendations for future policy and practice.

1.2 A SHIFTING PENAL LANDSCAPE

The penal landscape in England and Wales has recently undergone a substantial transformation in its organisation and delivery and thus the way community-based services, and to a lesser extent prison services, are provided. As described by the Justice Committee's (4th March 2015 HC 60-66) Ninth Report *Prisons: Planning and Policies*¹, Prisons in England and Wales have witnessed the introduction of budget cuts and the prison unit cost programme, also referred to as benchmarking costs. This has manifested in the implementation of 'new ways of working' involving prison closures and changes to both the prison regime and staffing (see also HC Deb 8 November 2012 Col 45WS).

The '*Transforming Rehabilitation*' initiative which the Conservative-led government put out to consultation in 2013, outlined how offenders would be managed in the community in England and Wales, involving - from early 2015 - the disbandment of the Probation Trusts and their replacement with a National Probation Service (which now deals with the

¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmjust/309/30906.htm>

approximately one third of service users who are high risk). The market was opened up to a diverse range of service providers, extending provision beyond what had traditionally been the province of the public sector to include voluntary and private sectors at the local as well as national level. In so doing, 21 multi-sectoral Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) were established and they are responsible for the management of the remaining two thirds of low to medium risk offenders in the community, including those released from short prison sentences of less than 12 months. With the introduction of community supervision for this group of short term prisoners, a nationwide ‘through the prison gate’ resettlement service was put in place, meaning that most people sentenced to less than 12 months in custody are held in a prison designated to their area for at least three months before release and are given continuous support by a single provider from custody through to community (Ministry of Justice, 2013).

User Voice responded to these changes with a user-led consultation on the Transforming Rehabilitation initiative, so that ‘[T]he inclusion of service user input during all stages of the process of reforming rehabilitation services’ was ensured (User Voice, 2013). Its Theory of Change model of Prison and Community Councils (see below) was deemed a necessary vehicle towards supporting the Transforming Rehabilitation ‘revolution’, not least in offering an alternative and cost-effective means of co-producing² the envisaged changes. It was in this climate of rapid change accompanied by proposed budget cuts and an emphasis on more cost effective services that User Voice Councils were implemented in London, Staffordshire and West Midlands and the North East. These Prison and Community Councils were located in six prisons and three CRC areas across England, namely HM Prisons Durham and Northumberland and the Northumbria CRC; HM Prisons Oakwood and Birmingham and the Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC; and HM Prisons Wormwood Scrubs and Pentonville and the London CRC. These specific areas were chosen because they offered continuity of Councils between prison and community and thus enabled User Voice to pilot the Through-The-Gate approach. These Councils were warmly welcomed by the respective service providers who recognised the value and capacity of the Council model in contributing to the development of more efficient and effective systems and services which listened to and harnessed the views and experiences of those involved in the criminal justice system. According to human resource management principles, ‘organisations are more effective when they deploy the intelligence, wisdom, and judgment of all of their members, particularly those on the front lines... involvement brings a sense of ownership and buys loyalty, dedication, and commitment’ (Toch, 1994: 65; see also Likert, 1967). By listening to the voices of prisoners and service users, and by collaboratively negotiating change through sustained dialogue, prisons and CRCs can reorganise and improve their service and regime procedures, which could result in cost-saving measures and the elimination of redundant or underutilised services, all while increasing user and staff satisfaction and contributing to

² Co-production refers to the ‘value coproduced by two or more actors... where both make substantial resource contributions’ (Bovaird, 2007: 847). Eriksson (2011: 5) relatedly stresses that the fundamental components of co-production are that ‘the user of the service is conceived *as part of* the service delivery, [that] there is a *close interaction* between staff and service users, *and the focus is on outcomes rather than merely ‘services’* [emphasis added]. Co-production has been employed as a strategy to streamline and enhance public services for several decades, though this model of service user engagement has yet to be properly utilised within the criminal justice system (Weaver, 2011; Weaver and McCulloch 2012).

shared outcomes as, for example, delineated in User Voice’s Theory of Change described below.

1.3 PRISON COUNCILS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW³

The aim of prisons has historically been to withhold liberty, maintain security and uphold social order, making them primarily coercive environments. This deprivation of liberty and autonomy has included the denial of a legitimate voice for prisoners in relation to prison conditions and treatment and yet, since the early 1990s, following the Strangeways Prison riots and informed by the subsequently published Woolf Report, local prison managers have recognised the need to establish legitimacy and encourage cooperation amongst prisoners.

They [prisoners] should be able to contribute to and be informed of the way things are run. This is a matter of common sense as well as of justice. If prisoners have a greater understanding of what is happening to them in prison and why, they are less likely to be aggrieved and become disaffected. This should, in turn, improve relations between staff and prisoners (Woolf, 1991, quoted in Solomon and Edgar, 2004: 3).

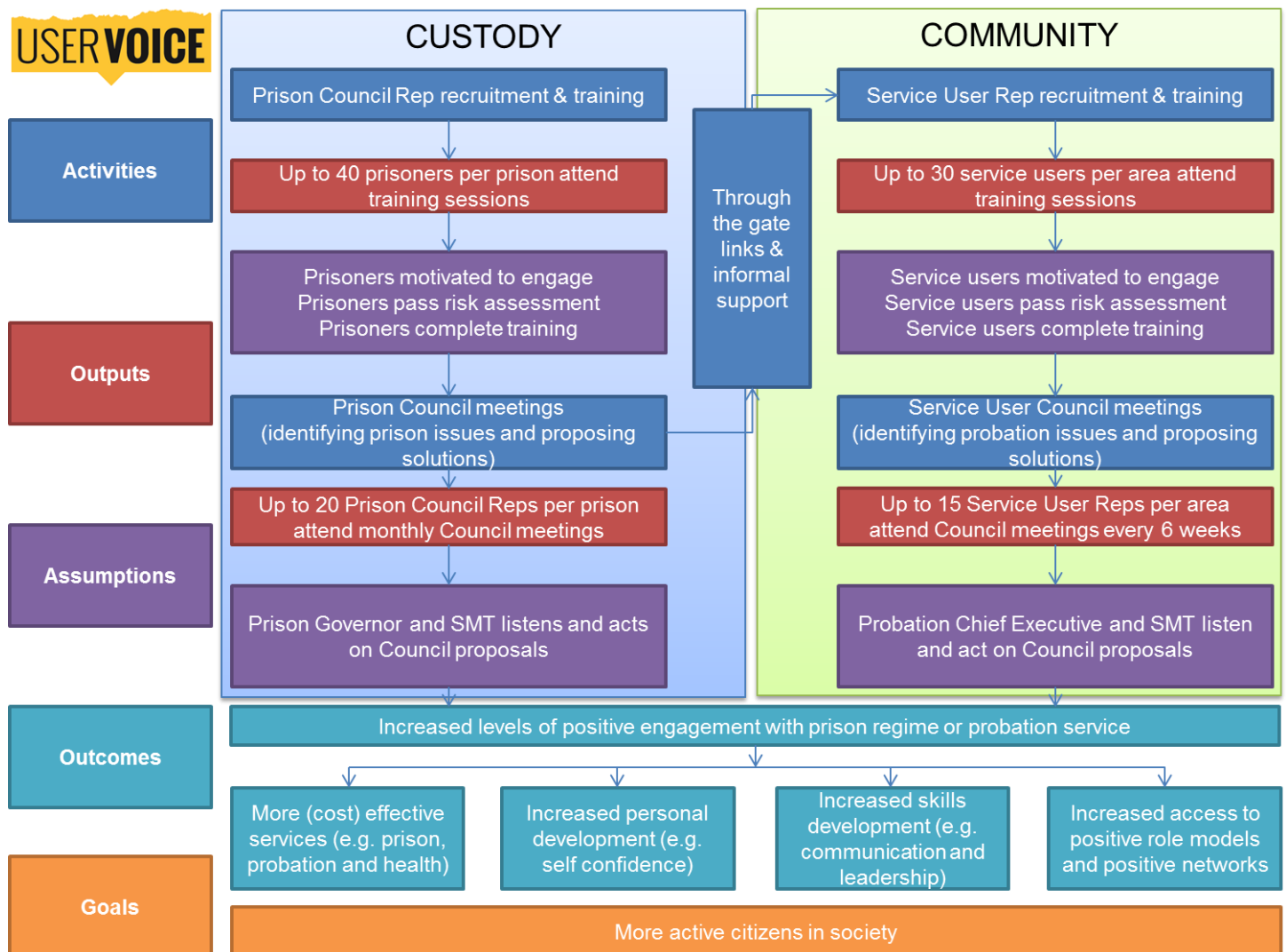
Although prisons in England and Wales have utilised various forms of service user involvement, including councils for several decades, centrally, the Prison Service in England and Wales has, heretofore, been resistant to a national policy on this form of engagement. Additionally, little empirical research has been conducted on their value to prisoners, institutional dynamics, or overall environment. Solomon and Edgar’s (2004) study was an exception, sampling seven prisons across England which had active prison-based councils. These authors suggested that despite the potential for such councils to create tensions between staff and prisoners and between prisoners themselves, the key features of the councils were to act as a sounding board for policy recommendations and prisoner concerns; improved communication and targeting of need; and an overall reduction in tensions resulting from prisoners’ unresolved grievances. They concluded that councils can give prisoners a crucial voice/influence; they can provide essential feedback to management on policy changes; they can engender a greater sense of responsibility/advocacy amongst prisoners; and they can promote active citizenship and successful rehabilitation.

1.4 USER VOICE COUNCILS

User Voice’s Prison and Community Councils, first set up in 2009 and 2011 respectively, are premised on a Theory of Change (see Figure 1 below) which identifies key activities and outputs involving prisoners and those subject to community supervision in association with service providers, namely prison governors/directors/prison staff and CRC chief executives/practitioners. The aim of the Councils is to increase engagement between service users and those tasked with their care, supervision and rehabilitation; to increase service users’ personal and skills development, access to positive role models and opportunities for civic engagement; and to work towards greater [cost] effectiveness of services designed to reduce re-offending and improve the life chances of people with convictions.

³ This section provides an overview of prison councils only, since community councils *per se* did not exist until introduced by User Voice (see Chapter 3 below).

Core features of the Council model include democratic inclusion, increased communication and dialogue, relational dynamics, future-oriented thinking, and a commitment to collective objectives; features typically lacking in the penal system. Additionally important is the underpinning values of civility, humanity, the recognition of prisoners as ‘citizens’, and the civic restoration of ex-offenders back into the community. The Council supports those involved and those affected to organise and articulate their concerns and frustrations in a solution-focused dialogue with both prison and CRC staff.

Figure 1: The User Voice Theory of Change

User Voice's organisational philosophy, 'Only offenders can stop re-offending', communicates the importance of personal choice and individual responsibility in behaviour and action, while the broader ethos of support through advocacy and a solution-focused approach to problem-solving directs the organisation's services and initiatives. This balance could be considered crucial in aiding people through the desistance process by meaningfully engaging their voices to enhance a system often found to further isolate those subject to it. User Voice and its Council model have value for enhancing prison/CRC standards, legitimacy and administrative effectiveness, and ensuring the Prison Service is indeed in line with its duty to look after prisoners 'with humanity and help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release' (HM Prison Service, 2012). The practice and preparation of creating an informed citizenry, or population, to be reintegrated through-the-gate back into society has great potential for restructuring penal culture, rehabilitation, increasing civic participation, and the promotion of desistance.

What is particularly distinctive about the User Voice Council model is the emphasis placed not just on outcomes, but on processes of engagement and its impact on those engaged. While the User Voice Council model has not previously been subject to rigorous evaluation, the outcomes from the evaluation of the early pilot of the Council model conducted across three prisons on the Isle of Wight are positive, particularly in terms of prisoner participation in the process, which comprised 58 per cent of prisoners in Albany, 52 per cent in Camp Hill, and 51 per cent in Parkhurst (see User Voice, 2010). User Voice (2010) reports that at the Albany site, during the pilot period, there was a 37 per cent reduction in complaints from prisoners and at Parkhurst the number of segregation days reduced from 160 to 47 days, which they suggest may be indicative of a reduction in prisoner dissatisfaction and tensions. User Voice (2010) found that its model required some adaptation to reflect the challenges presented by prisons populated by short sentence prisoners and, by inference, the continuation of those challenges on release. The evaluation found that at Camp Hill, the high turnover of prisoners meant that continuity and discussion were constrained. Notwithstanding this, both prison staff and prisoners identified a number of benefits of prison Councils. Prisoners identified that the Councils were a mechanism for their voices to be heard, and as a means through which to gain access to staff and management structures, exchange information and improve both communication and transparency in decision-making. User Voice (2010) indicated that while there were limited examples of significant changes, a number of smaller changes had been realised, including changes to family visiting arrangements, shifts in prisoners' earnings, food choices, and other domiciliary issues.

Despite the support of governors and senior officers, that research suggested there was considerable scepticism in the early stages about the use of Councils, particularly among prison officers. This seems to relate to issues of power – for example, that Councils might mean that staff are being 'managed' by prisoners or that prisoners would have more access to senior staff than prison officers did. Others saw Councils as a senior management imposition, which emphasised the need for User Voice to engage more effectively with prison officers about the potential benefits of the Council model in the early stages, to support their 'buy in'. The benefits identified by staff included the reduction of conflict and tensions, and thus improvements in the management, engagement, and education of prisoners and the redistribution of resources.

Possibly the most robust evidence on the User Voice Prison Council model undertaken to date is by Schmidt (2013, 2014) who identified four main areas in which change was effected:

1. Prisoner identities: 'For many prisoners, the Council and participation in it assisted them in conceptualising a positive and productive identity with future-oriented aspirations' (Schmidt, 2013, p.12), and represented an opportunity to transcend the label of prisoner/offender.
2. Staff-prisoner relationships: 'were reformulated on increased levels of recognition and trust, and many developed long-term faith that these relations would continue to get better, aided by the collaborative work needed to sustain the Council' (ibid, p.13).
3. Wellbeing: '[T]he Council enabled prisoners to feel more secure and certain in an often unstable atmosphere, lessening tensions, anxiety, and increasing overall

feelings of wellbeing’ (ibid, p.13), and produced affective outcomes such as a sense of self-worth, pride, usefulness, confidence and increased maturity.

4. Community: ‘[B]y establishing a Council that allowed prisoners to be recognised through constructive dialogue, efforts centred on community betterment allowed a sense of collective responsibility to be developed. This created an environment of inclusion and purpose, and impacted on the wider prison culture’ (ibid, pp.12-13). This in turn strengthens systemic legitimacy through fair proceedings and justifiable decision-making.

1.5 THE USER VOICE MODEL IN PRACTICE

As previously acknowledged, different establishments in different areas were at different stages of the implementation process; some Prison and Community Councils were in the early stages of being established, others had been operating for a number of years. Table 1 below illustrates these varying start times for the Councils, bearing in mind that a ‘start date’ is not fixed in stone given the contractual and election processes before the first official Council meeting is held.

Table 1: Approximate start dates for User Voice Councils under study

Project	Approximate start date
Staffordshire and West Midlands CRC	August, 2014
Northumbria CRC	January, 2012
London CRC	March, 2011
HMP Northumberland	May, 2014
HMP Durham	November, 2014
HMP Oakwood	March, 2014
HMP Birmingham	September, 2012
HMP Pentonville	April, 2014
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	September, 2014

The Prison Council model preceded the development of the Community Council model and, while reflecting the different context but retaining a largely similar framework to the Prison Council, some modifications to the Community Council model were made. In particular, there is no election process: Community Councils are established through a consultative process which includes the distribution and analysis of questionnaires and service user focus groups and which culminates in ‘co-production between us and the CRC’ (User Voice Staff).

There is some further variation in how the Councils operate both within and across different establishments and areas, with the existence of ‘rep groups’, ‘surgeries’ and thematic ‘working groups’ in different Council settings depending on practical considerations such as geographical spread and population diversity as well as the turnover of different prison populations.

I think the model possibly is slightly different or slightly tweaked in every prison...you've got to work with the category...the general demographic...it's always, I suppose, in some type of flux depending on who you have on the Council at the time. So the model is...it's a guide, if you like...you've got to be open to a little bit of tweaking here and there because different jails are gonna want different things (User Voice Staff).

'Surgeries' take place in both the prison and community context and inform the development of proposals that are the subject of the Council meetings - although the precise process through which this occurs differs between different CRCs. Essentially, however:

At the surgeries, User Voice staff and volunteers 'ask the service users, what do you think could be helpful to make your life easier being on probation?' And we write it up in our proposal (User Voice Staff).

User Voice Engagement Team Members attend meetings usually once a week with Council members but are also in close contact with them at other times, both in prison and in the community. Meetings with the Governor/Director or CRC Chief Officer once a month take the form of a relatively democratic, structured discussion in which the proposals, which are oriented to addressing collective issues and proposing solutions, are negotiated and ensuing actions agreed. 'Like any democratic process' (Prison Officer), the manner in which these proposals are selected is achieved through a process of discussion and negotiation and 'because it's a democratic society, the majority, we go with it' (ibid). The agreed proposals are thereafter discussed at the monthly Council meetings which are usually chaired by the Governor/Director or CRC Chief Executive Officer or their nominated representative and can include a diverse range of affected and interested parties depending on the proposals submitted to the meeting.

1.6 THE USER VOICE THROUGH-THE-GATE COUNCIL MODEL

There is currently a lacking vision, within a criminal justice context, of a 'seamless transition' from prison to community for released prisoners, although both prison and Community Rehabilitation Company senior managers are aware of the need for better communication and collaboration in that regard (see Chapter 3). Indeed, Through-The-Gate type initiatives are being set up within certain CRCs currently, which recognise an increasing awareness of the need for continuity of service between prison and community, but such initiatives are in their infancy.

Since its inception, User Voice has refined and developed its Council model to include a Through-The-Gate approach which enables Council members to be recruited, trained and elected in Prison Councils and continue this role on release into Community Councils. Prison Council members in local resettlement prisons, or in prisons which also have a Community Council equivalent, can thus be linked to a Community Council in those areas, and be offered informal staff, volunteer and peer support in that process of transition.

The original aim of this evaluation was to assess the implementation, operation and short-term outcomes of the Through-The-Gate Council model of prisoner/service user participation/integration in the six prisons and three CRC areas under study. It was felt important that there was continuity of care in the transition from prison to community, not least given the rapidly changing environment resulting from the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda. The Through-The-Gate model was premised on the need to provide a Community Council within the community where the Prison Councils were operational so that Prison Council members could, if they wanted, have a smoother transition between Prison and Community Council. However, User Voice has found it difficult to fully implement a Through-The-Gate model of Council participation, partly because of where it currently operates Prison Councils (which are not always local resettlement prisons) and Community Councils (which are not always located in the same geographical area as the Prison Councils). These differences in stages of implementation, to greater or lesser degrees affected by the effects of systemic, organisational and operational changes heralded by the *Transforming Rehabilitation* agenda, have necessarily affected the progression of the Through-The-Gate Council model at this time. This original model would also seem less effective, operationally, given the lack of staff continuity between prisons and CRCs currently and the fact that prisoner ‘churn’ to a certain extent discourages a smooth and well planned transition from custody to community. While User Voice has nevertheless helped several individuals to make a smoother transition from prison on release because of the availability of a Community Council in a prisoner’s local community, this has been sporadic⁴ and perhaps not in the systematic way envisaged by the Through-The-Gate model to date. Current arrangements thus preclude a systematic evaluation of User Voice Councils based on the Through-The-Gate model.

Once the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda becomes more established, it is undoubtedly the case that service providers both in prisons and in the community will seek to offer a more ‘seamless service’ to service users in the hope of encouraging reintegration and desistance. Scoping interview respondents were unanimous in their positive response to the Through-The-Gate User Voice Council model which was considered particularly innovative, and indeed essential to rehabilitation:

When service users are released from prison, it’s a real critical time... and if they’ve actually participated in the Prison Council... satisfaction from doing that ... the fact that there is support available for them when they come through the gate is incredibly important. I think that the Community Councils, the fact that they’ve got something to do with their day, they’ve got a purpose, a reason to get up in the morning, and being supported by their peers, they’re doing something constructive, they feel valued, they feel listened to (Scoping interview 5).

Equally, it was felt important by some stakeholders to establish closer links between prison and community more generally. It was suggested that greater collaboration between Prison and Community Councils would strengthen the case for a Through-The-Gate model of

⁴ Only one of the community respondents in this evaluation could be considered a quasi Through-the-Gate participant. He first encountered User Voice and began engaging with the Council during his few months in one of the prisons under study. He was then transferred to another prison which did not have a council, but joined the Community Council almost immediately after being released.

working, but logistically, the Community Councils would have to go to the Prison Councils, rather than vice versa. Despite an acknowledgement that the model used in prisons could not be replicated in the community because of different settings and cultures, greater collaboration between the two would enable the sharing of success stories and issues which could encourage each Council to learn from the other, thus paving the way for the Through-The-Gate model to become more established.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCH – METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 THE RESEARCH TEAM

In order to undertake an evaluation of the User Voice Prison and Community Councils, User Voice commissioned Monica Barry and Beth Weaver of the University of Strathclyde, in association with Mark Liddle, ARCS Ltd and Bethany Schmidt, University of Cambridge, and with input from Shadd Maruna, Rosie Meek, and Judy Renshaw. The research took place between May 2014 and March 2016.

2.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the implementation, operation and short-term outcomes of the User Voice Prison and Community Councils which were being implemented in six prisons and three CRC areas across England. The research had five objectives:

1. to evaluate the effectiveness of the project in addressing the outcomes and goals delineated in the Theory of Change and participant journey;
2. to evaluate the success of the project in meeting commissioners' objectives and priorities;
3. to identify consistent and rigorous data collection methods across the projects and across time which can measure performance, impacts and outcomes as outlined in the Theory of Change;
4. to evaluate the Council model and operational and administrative processes used in the project; and
5. to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the pilots, in order to assess their ability to offer added value and efficiency to prisoner engagement and community reintegration.

2.3 METHODS

The research team used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. The intention to triangulate the data⁵ was particularly important given the sensitivity of the data collected within both prison and CRC environments and the resultant likelihood that such data would be difficult to access. We were also conscious of the fact that the 'soft' outcomes delineated in the Theory of Change model (for example, increased confidence or self-esteem) were not easily measurable other than through eliciting perceived changes

⁵ Denzin (1970) coined the term 'triangulation' to highlight the need to gather data from different empirical sources so as to determine or increase the accuracy of each dataset.

over time (using waves of questionnaires) or through narrative data from those involved in the Councils. The following methods thus proved helpful *in combination* in order to gain an overall sense of people's actual and perceived experiences of User Voice Councils.

1. A review of the literature on user involvement in criminal justice services, Council models, co-production and desistance. This review informed the development of the research instruments, measurement tools, the analytical framework and the conclusions and recommendations.

2. Scoping interviews with key project implementers/advisors were conducted between May-June 2014 in order to gather feedback from key staff and other representatives concerning the history of the Councils, their intended outcomes as delineated in the Theory of Change, and on the Council model itself and its operational and administrative processes. Five key stakeholders involved in or advising on the implementation of the pilot Councils were interviewed, comprising two prison governors/directors, a User Voice Senior Management Team member, a senior independent researcher, and a CRC Chief Executive Officer. These individuals were recommended to the team by User Voice as having knowledge of the rationale for, or the operation of, User Voice Councils.

3. Collection of official aggregate data and key performance indicators – including information from prisons on adjudications, assaults on staff/prisoners, use of force and complaints, and information from CRCs on offender programmes, future employment opportunities and breach rates. The purpose of accessing this information was to allow the research team to assess User Voice impacts on the efficiency and manageability of service provision in relevant prisons and CRCs, which are highlighted in the User Voice Theory of Change. Information concerning most of the above measures in respect of previous years had already been accessed by the team at the start of the research period, but a second tranche of data was requested toward the end of the research covering the period between September 2012 and December 2015 for the six prisons under study (Birmingham, Durham, Northumberland, Oakwood, Pentonville and Wormwood Scrubs) and the three CRC areas under study (London, Northumbria and Staffordshire and West Midlands). Throughout this report, these areas have been anonymised under Areas A, B and C.

Further to that request, the team was granted access via the NOMS Performance Hub⁶ to a wide range of current indicators. Datasets were downloaded relating to 24 prison metrics, and 34 relating to CRC operations. Further details concerning the analysis of this material are provided in Chapter 5.

4. Advising and assisting User Voice project staff on data collection and the design and use of monitoring and evaluation strategies/tools. ARCS liaised closely with User Voice staff to construct a secure database for use as a resource by designated User Voice team members which can be accessed both centrally and remotely. The database has key forms for 'core

⁶ In order to make central performance and related data accessible to the full range of individuals who might require it (including outside researchers), NOMS set up the Performance Hub to house a wide variety of data concerning key performance indicators and other documentation. The Hub is web-based and can be accessed by anyone who has applied for and been granted relevant clearance and login credentials to access the material.

data’ (which varies by type of project that the participant might be involved in, but includes about two dozen fields for identifying details); progression through projects (including details about numbers of sessions/hours of involvement, start and finish dates with reasons, etc); and specific questionnaires for measuring individual progress (such as initial and follow-up versions of the User Voice Personal Development Record, or PDR, but also IOMI, if User Voice decides to keep using that instrument). The web-based version also has a facility for entering data relating to non-client-based material, such as that generated by User Voice’s engagement surveys (which gather Pre- and Post-Council feedback from both service users and staff). A separate section for centralising details about ‘achievements’ is also incorporated.

5. Collection of self-completion questionnaire data from prisoner and service user Council members in order to generate wide-ranging feedback concerning service user backgrounds, expectations, experiences and individual progress. This involved the use of two self-completion questionnaires (which were designed specifically by the research team for this purpose and administered near the start of the research or near the start of a prisoner/service user’s involvement - the initial questionnaire, and at the end of the fieldwork period – the follow-up questionnaire)⁷ and the use of follow up Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instruments (IOMIs), which offer a more nuanced measure of change over time in key dimensions associated with emotional and personal development⁸.

Initial questionnaires were completed in prison between August 2014 and July 2015, and in the participating CRCs between August 2014 and June 2015. In total, 200 initial surveys were completed: 132 in the six designated prisons, and 68 in the three designated CRC areas. *Follow-up questionnaires* were completed in prison between August and December 2015, and in the participating CRCs between July and December 2015. In total, 35 follow-up surveys were completed by Council participants who had also completed the initial questionnaire: 27 in the six designated prisons, and 8 in two designated CRC areas. No follow-up surveys were completed by participants in the Northumbria CRC area. To some extent, a low follow-up rate was expected from prison participants because most of the prisons in the sample are local, remand prisons with a fluid population. Many of the Council members in these prisons who had completed an initial questionnaire were no longer in the prison, and could therefore not be surveyed for the follow-up.

Quantitative data from the initial and follow-up questionnaires were analysed in SPSS. Qualitative data from the questionnaires were analysed through manual thematic coding.

⁷ These main questionnaires were designed by the team, in consultation with User Voice, to gather basic details concerning participants and their involvement with User Voice; the forms were designed very carefully in accordance with standard design practice, but issues concerning validation and reliability would not apply to this kind of data collection.

⁸ Copies of these tools are attached in an Appendix.

Table 2: Overview of numbers of questionnaires by area

Location	No. of initial questionnaires	No. of follow-up questionnaires
HMP Pentonville	17	3
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	16	4
HMP Birmingham	36	3
HMP Oakwood	31	7
HMP Northumberland	16	6
HMP Durham	16	4
<i>Prison Total</i>	<i>132</i>	<i>27</i>
London CRC	42	4
Staffordshire & West Midlands CRC	10	4
Northumbria CRC	16	0
<i>CRC Total</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>8</i>
Total	200	35

Demographic profile of questionnaire respondents

Respondents to the initial Prison Council questionnaire were all male, and nearly half (49.6%) were aged between 31-45 years old. The majority (50.8%) of completed surveys came from the West Midlands prisons. Over half (56.3%) identified their ethnicity as White, one-third (29.4%) as Black, and 14.3% as Asian. Nearly 10% were foreign nationals. Almost 80% were on 'enhanced' IEP level, with only 10% having spent time in the segregation unit. Most were sentenced (68.2%), and serving determinate sentences (68.8%) of 3-10 years (48.4%). For one-third (33.3%) of our sample, this was their first time incarcerated. Nearly 20% had spent more than 10 years of their life in prison, and over half (53.9%) had two or more convictions over their lifetime. These men were generally well supported, as almost all (96.7%) indicated that they were in regular contact with family or friends. Most (81.7%) respondents first heard about the User Voice Council either through other prisoners, Council members, or general word of mouth (62.6%), or from encountering a User Voice employee (19.1%). At the time of the initial questionnaire, over 90% had been involved in the prison Council less than six months.

Respondents to the initial Community Council questionnaires were mostly male (63.1%), and over half (55.8%) were between 26-40 years old. The majority (61.8%) of completed surveys came from London. Over half (52.3%) identified their ethnicity as White, 44.6% as Black, and only 3.1% as Asian. Just over 10% were foreign nationals. Most were under a community or suspended sentence order (61%), and were on license or parole from a normal (determinate) sentence (65.6%). One-third (29.7%) of this sample had never been incarcerated, while nearly 20% had spent more than 10 years of their life in prison. They were generally well supported, with nearly all (91.9%) respondents indicating that they were in regular contact with family or friends. Most respondents first heard about the User Voice Council either from their probation⁹ officer/worker (46.3%), or through a friend, word of

⁹ The word probation is used to imply CRC throughout this report, notably where used by service users.

mouth, or from the User Voice website (22.4%). Half (56.1%) had been involved in the Prison Council less than six months, and one-third (31.6%) for 7-18 months. Nearly 10% had previously been involved in a Prison Council or other type of prisoner consultative committee.

In total, 27 Prison Council participants from six prisons in London, the West Midlands, and the North East of England completed the follow-up questionnaire. These 27 Council participants had also completed the baseline questionnaire. Table 3 below shows the demographics and other characteristics of this sample.

Table 3: User Voice prison council follow-up questionnaire

Total number of baseline survey respondents in sample:		27	
		No. of respondents¹⁰	% of total sample
Prison	HMP Pentonville	3	11.1
	HMP Wormwood Scrubs	4	14.8
	HMP Birmingham	3	11.1
	HMP Oakwood	7	25.9
	HMP Northumberland	6	22.2
	HMP Durham	4	14.8
Age	21-25 years old (inclusive)	3	11.1
	26-30 years old (inclusive)	2	7.4
	31-35 years old (inclusive)	3	11.1
	36-40 years old (inclusive)	6	22.2
	41-45 years old (inclusive)	2	7.4
	46-50 years old (inclusive)	4	14.8
	51-55 years old (inclusive)	5	18.5
	56 years or over (inclusive)	2	7.4
Ethnicity grouping	White	18	66.7
	Black	5	18.5
	Asian	4	14.8
IEP level	Standard	1	3.7
	Enhanced	26	96.3
Spent time in segregation	Yes	2	7.4
	No	25	92.6
Been given an adjudication	Yes	5	18.5
	No	22	81.5
Current status	Remand/untried	1	3.7
	Convicted, but not yet sentenced	1	3.7
	Sentenced	24	88.9
	License recall/revoke	1	3.7

¹⁰ Note: Throughout the document, where responses do not total 27, responses are missing (primarily due to respondents not answering questions). Percentage figure is calculated as a proportion of the *number of responses for that particular question*.

Which type of sentence are you serving	Normal (determinate)	18	66.7
	EPP	3	11.1
	IPP	1	3.7
	Life sentence	3	11.1
	Don't know	2	7.4
How long is your sentence (or tariff)	1-2 years	1	4.0
	3-5 years	6	24.0
	6-10 years	9	36.0
	11-15 years	2	8.0
	More than 15 years	4	16.0
	N/A (not yet sentenced)	3	12.0
In regular contact with family or friends	Yes	27	100.0
	No	0	0.0
How long involved in the User Voice prison council	0-6 months	4	16.7
	7-12 months	13	54.2
	13-18 months	4	16.7
	19-24 months	2	8.3
	Over 2 years	1	4.2
Council made things better, worse, or no difference	Better	25	92.6
	Worse	0	0.0
	No difference	1	3.7
Self-rated skill levels on a scale of 1-10 (mean scores)	Leadership	8.31	
	Communicating	8.45	
	Reading and writing	8.65	
	Public speaking	7.54	
	Negotiation	8.12	
	Anger management	8.15	
	Task completion	8.42	
	Working with others	8.62	
	Managing stress	8.00	

Respondents to the follow-up Prison Council questionnaire were less demographically diverse. All were male, and more than 70% were over 36 years old. The majority (66.7%) identified their ethnicity as White, with the remaining 18.5% as Black, and 14.8% as Asian. Nearly all (96.3%) were on the 'enhanced' level of the Earned Incentives and Privileges Scheme (IEP), with less than 10% having spent time in the segregation unit. Most were sentenced (88.9%), and serving determinate sentences (66.7%) of 3-10 years (60%). 70% had been involved with the User Voice Prison Council for one year or less. Only one survey respondent was no longer involved in the Council.

In total, 8 Community Council participants from London and the West Midlands of England completed the follow-up questionnaire. These 8 Council participants had also completed the baseline questionnaire. Table 4 below shows the demographics and other characteristics of this sample.

Table 4: User Voice community council follow-up questionnaire

Total number of baseline survey respondents in sample:		8	
		No. of respondents¹¹	% of total sample
Probation (CRC) area	London	4	50.0
	Staffordshire and West Midlands	4	50.0
	Northumbria	0	0.0
Gender	Male	5	62.5
	Female	3	37.5
Age	21-25 years old (inclusive)	2	25.0
	26-30 years old (inclusive)	1	12.5
	36-40 years old (inclusive)	2	25.0
	41-45 years old (inclusive)	1	12.5
	46-50 years old (inclusive)	2	25.0
Ethnicity grouping	White	5	62.5
	Black	2	25.0
	Asian	1	12.5
Type of supervision for this conviction	Community order	4	50.0
	Suspended sentence order	2	25.0
	Parole license	1	12.5
	Other (no supervision)	1	12.5
Times been subject to a community sentence before now	This is my first time	2	25.0
	2-5 times	5	62.5
	6-9 times	1	12.5
Times been in prison before now	I have never been in prison	3	37.5
	Once	2	25.0
	2-5 times	2	25.0
	10 or more times	1	12.5
In regular contact with family or friends	Yes	8	100.0
	No	0	0.0
How would you rate your support network on a scale of 1-10		7.63	
How long involved in the User Voice community council	7-12 months	5	62.5
	13-18 months	1	12.5
	19-24 months	1	12.5
	Over 2 years	1	12.5

¹¹ Note: Throughout the document, where responses do not total 8, responses are missing (primarily due to respondents not answering questions). Percentage figure is calculated as a proportion of the *number of responses for that particular question*.

Still involved in the council	Yes	7	87.5
	No	1	12.5

Council made things better, worse, or no difference	Better	7	87.5
	Worse	0	0.0
	No difference	0	0.0
Self-rated skill levels on a scale of 1-10 (mean scores)	Leadership	8.75	
	Communicating	9.37	
	Reading and writing	9.13	
	Public speaking	9.00	
	Negotiation	8.75	
	Anger management	9.13	
	Task completion	8.87	
	Working with others	9.63	
	Managing stress	8.88	

Respondents to the follow-up Community Council questionnaires were mostly male (62.5%), and over half (62.5%) were between 36 and 50 years old. Respondents from London and Staffordshire and West Midlands CRCs were equally represented in the number of completed surveys (four from each). No follow-up surveys were completed in the Northumbria CRC. Over half (62.5%) identified their ethnicity as White, 25% as Black, and 12.5% as Asian. Nearly all were under a community or suspended sentence order (75%), with most (62.5%) having been subject to a community sentence 2-5 times before their current conviction. One-third (37.5%) of this sample had never been incarcerated, while one-third (37.5%) had been in prison two or more times. Most (62.5%) had been involved with the User Voice community Council for 7-12 months. Half stated that they regularly participated in weekly and monthly Council meetings, whilst the other half participated solely in monthly meetings. Only one respondent was no longer involved in the Council due to a conflict in scheduling with their full-time job. All follow-up respondents indicated that they were well supported, and were in regular contact with family or friends.

The Intermediate Outcomes Measurement Instrument (IOMI) is a tool designed for use by service providers who work with people involved in the criminal justice system and other vulnerable groups. It is administered to participants at the start of a programme of work and is re-administered at regular intervals thereafter in order to measure change. All questions use standard Likert categories for responses to general statements (i.e. 'strongly agree', 'agree', and so on)¹². The instrument contains 21 items and these are apportioned across seven key dimensions as follows:

¹² The full IOMI also includes a 'practical problems inventory' which is an amended version of a section used in CRIME PICS II, but this section is usually deemed not to be applicable to respondents in custody – since that section is designed to gather perceptions about potential problems that are relevant to respondents after release (e.g. areas such as housing, debt, employment, etc.).

- resilience (2 items)
- wellbeing (3 items)
- agency and self-efficacy (3 items)
- impulsivity (3 items)
- motivation to change (3 items)
- hope (3 items)
- interpersonal trust (4 items)

This tool was chosen because it has recently been designed and tested for measuring precisely the kinds of individual changes in personal wellbeing that the User Voice Theory of Change highlights as being key benefits of involvement. There are other available tools which do purport to measure changes in some of the dimensions referred to above, but many of these have been designed ‘in-house’ by non-researchers or are otherwise not validated or tested for reliability. Others have too narrow a focus on only single dimensions (e.g. the Rosenberg Self-Esteem measure) or are difficult for service providers to administer (e.g. because they require too much completion time). The IOMI tool was designed after very detailed national consultation with hundreds of service providers, and has been shown to have strong internal validity, and test-retest reliability. It is used by an increasing number of organisations that work with a range of vulnerable groups, and although it still requires more detailed testing with larger national datasets, it is often selected for use because of its relative ease of administration and its robustness in relation to other tools available for this purpose (e.g. the Outcome Star).

As of January 2016, information from 301 completed IOMIs was held in the IOMI database. That number includes 220 initial IOMIs, 55 first follow-ups, 20 second follow-ups, and 6 third follow-up IOMIs.

6. Interviews with Council participants were undertaken to gather feedback from Prison Council members and Community Council members. Structured interviews with prisoners/service users addressed initial engagement and motivations, participant inclusivity, value of participation, improving skills and changing outlooks, and Council limitations, frustrations and recommendations. Interviewees were recruited by User Voice workers as appropriate to participate in this process. In total, 21 Prison Council participants and 13 Community Council participants were interviewed between April and October 2015. Three Prison Council non-participants were also interviewed: two in Area A and one in Area B. ‘Non-participants’ were defined as those who had previously been involved in the Prison Council, but had since ceased participation due to their own choosing or had been involved in the Council for a limited period only (less than two to three months) before deciding to stop participation. No interviews were conducted with participants at HMP Wormwood Scrubs because the Council was still in the development phase during the interviewing period. Sixteen Prison Council interviewees and 12 Community Council interviewees had completed an initial questionnaire.

All recorded interviews were transcribed. Transcriptions, along with notes from the interviews, were manually analysed and thematically coded.

Table 5: Overview of numbers of interviews by establishment

Location	No. of participant interviews
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	0
HMP Pentonville	3
HMP Oakwood	6
HMP Birmingham	2
HMP Durham	3
HMP Northumberland	7
<i>Prison total</i>	<i>21</i>
London CRC	5
Staffordshire & West Midlands CRC	3
Northumbria CRC	5
<i>CRC total</i>	<i>13</i>

The 21 Prison Council interviewees ranged in age from 28-56 years old. Two were on remand, one was convicted and awaiting sentence, and one was serving a life sentence. The remaining 17 were serving sentences that ranged from 3-27 years. Active involvement in the Council ranged from six weeks to more than two years.

The 13 Community Council interviewees ranged in age from 28 to 68 years old. Only one female participant was interviewed. Over half of these participants were no longer formally connected with the criminal justice system: either their community orders/licenses had already been completed or expired, or in the case of one, he had never been on license but was an ex-offender who had been released from prison many years before. For the others, their license orders were from one to just over two years in length. Involvement in the Council ranged from just a few months to nearly three years.

7. Interviews with User Voice Engagement Team Leaders and Engagement Team Members, prison and CRC offender managers and User Voice mentors/peer supporters elicited whether and in what ways the Councils had been implemented as planned; areas of continuity and change in the operation and administration of the Councils; how and why any changes were made; and their perceptions of the impacts of any changes on specific outcomes. Further areas of enquiry included perceptions of any barriers to implementation, how they were to be addressed and any impact these activities had on outcomes. These were face to face semi-structured interviews lasting on average one hour. The benefits of semi-structured interviews are that the interviewer can elicit immediate and spontaneous perceptions of a topic and discuss further any emerging issues. Prison officers and other prison staff were included either because of their involvement in the Councils, because of their long-established employment in the prison or because they were known to be more sceptical of the Councils. CRC ground staff were interviewed because of their involvement with service users as offender managers or liaison workers.

Interviews were held between September and November 2015 with 34 personnel, including prison staff (x 8), probation staff (x 3) and User Voice staff and volunteers (x 11).

Analysis of the qualitative data from staff interviews was done manually, identifying key themes common to the majority of respondents but also identifying outliers and differences between the three case study areas.

8. Interviews with Prison Governors, CRC Chief Executive (or equivalent) and Senior Management Team members built on and were informed by those undertaken with practitioners and external agency staff. These interviews were conducted with 12 individuals at a senior level: Governors/Directors of prisons (x 6), senior CRC staff (x 4) and senior managers within User Voice (x 2). Discussion focused on a similar range of issues to those undertaken with practitioners, with additional areas of enquiry including their experiences of working within the Council model and perceptions of Council processes and outcomes; impact on resources, management strategies and strategic and operational policies; perceived impacts and effects on staff and service user/prisoner relationships/engagement; and perceptions of the role and contribution of the project on prison and probation decision making.

9. Focus groups and participatory social mapping with members of Prison and Community Councils were undertaken in London, Staffordshire and West Midlands and the North East, with one group of Prison Council members and two groups of Community Council members between September and October, 2015. The events explored participants' perceptions of the value and impact of the Councils, similarities and differences in their motivations for becoming and staying involved and experiences of participation in terms of process, impacts and outcomes, and how their perceptions had changed as a collective over the course of their involvement. As with other aspects of the fieldwork process, the focus group topics and prompts were broadly informed by the intended outcomes and outcome indicators and the literature review. Techniques of participatory social mapping¹³ were also used to encourage participants to freely and collaboratively define and explore the issues and experiences that are important to them.

The rationale for the focus groups and participatory mapping was that these approaches explicitly recognise participants as research collaborators and they foster empowerment by drawing on participants' expertise to shape discussion with minimal intervention from the Research Team. Mapping can, as we found, generate a rich understanding of people's *collective* experiences and the connections between people and organisations over time, by charting experiential journeys. This method was chosen as it is congruent with the aims, objectives and ethos of User Voice, by enabling the issues and concerns that matter to Council members to inform and direct the discussion. However, these methods, involving a limited number of people, are not representative of or generalizable to the wider population of council members. In terms of recruitment, we asked UV Engagement Team Leaders/Team members as appropriate to ask Council members to participate in this process. In this regard, and necessarily, a purposive sampling technique was applied.

¹³ Emmel (2008) <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/540/2/2008-07-toolkit-participatory-map.pdf>

10. A cost-benefit analysis assessed value for money, and drew conclusions concerning whether User Voice outcomes appeared to justify the costs, as well as exploring the implementation costs and ‘added value’ of User Voice activities in the areas focused on. As part of our assessment of costs and benefits we examined details about the costs associated with the design and delivery of User Voice projects, and accessed and analysed User Voice information concerning throughputs of participants by type of project over time, and the costs of User Voice projects at each of the 6 prison and 3 CRC sites. In order to gain a greater understanding of what key stakeholders felt the key issues were in relation to User Voice costs and benefits, we conducted telephone interviews with 8 key stakeholders (although these discussions were not transcribed) and communicated via e-mail with others between September 2015 and February 2016. These discussions were intended to generate feedback concerning a number of key questions such as:

- which kinds of changes do key staff identify as being most desirable in cost-benefit terms and how are these prioritised?
- which specific measures are deemed crucial in assessing such changes?
- what threshold of change would be required to demonstrate that a particular programme or intervention was worth investing in?

The discussions were also designed to gather more specific feedback from stakeholders about the estimation of actual costs and benefits which were of interest to them – so that the team could generate evidence-based estimates for the costs of prison adjudications, for example, if such estimates had not already been produced by service staff.

All of the other data collected as part of the evaluation informed our assessment of the costs and benefits of User Voice activities, since an assessment of that kind requires that judgments are made about impacts generated by those activities. Of particular importance to the cost-benefit strand however, was information from the NOMS Performance Hub concerning key variables (which were together used to understand possible User Voice impacts on service provision), and information from participants and other stakeholders concerning both the latter impacts and changes experienced by individual participants.

2.4 LIMITATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS OF DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In this section we highlight a number of methodological limitations and constraints on the delivery of the research (and steps that were taken to address these). We have described these separately by broad topic area.

2.4.1 *Collection of official data*

Whilst we made every effort to secure official data on named individuals, we were unable to do so because of data protection issues raised at the particular sites, although we did manage to secure some of this material both from individual User Voice participants, and with the assistance of User Voice staff. Accessing and analysing aggregate official data did not present any real difficulties however, although the team was not granted access to the full range of data requested.

2.4.2 *Selection of interviewees*

Although the selection of individual User Voice participants for interview was not made randomly, decisions were carefully considered in terms of which participants we were aware of (in close consultation with User Voice team members) and who might be available at specific times to provide us with feedback after giving consent to do so. Efforts were also made to gather feedback from people who could be deemed to be ‘non-participants’, so that we would have feedback from people who might be critical of User Voice work (or of being involved in it). Although there may have been some ‘availability bias’ in the final sample of participant interviewees, we do not think that this will have had a major impact on any of our conclusions about impact (and the range of their feedback supports this assumption).

Selection of interviewees from other stakeholder groups was made purposively, and so does not raise the same issues concerning possible selection bias.

2.4.3 *Administration and collection of questionnaires*

There were a number of limitations to the administration and collection of questionnaires, some of which were inevitable and expected, and others that were unforeseen. A somewhat low return rate was expected from prison participants in the follow-up questionnaire because most of the prisons in the sample are remand prisons with a high turnover rate, and although steps were taken to increase completion rates, matched pairs of initial and follow-up questionnaires were still fewer than hoped. Within the community, follow-up questionnaire rates were also low, partly because of difficulties in ‘tracking down’ often transient populations.

There was also a low return rate for follow-up IOMIs. Attempts were made to get IOMIs completed during Council or other meetings with service users, but this was not always possible. Related factors also made it difficult to encourage new Council participants to complete initial IOMIs as soon as possible after becoming involved, and a further effort was made by User Voice staff with support from the research team during the final quarter of 2015 to try and increase the number of initial IOMIs completed as soon as possible after each participant’s start date with User Voice. Although that exercise did help to increase the number of adequate baseline IOMIs, the main problem remained, and together with the above difficulty with follow-up IOMIs, this did affect the range and reliability of analysis of the final IOMI dataset.

Clearly, there are issues with survey methods of this kind concerning attrition and possible bias – because those who are possible follow-up respondents but who do not respond, will often differ in key respects from those who able to (and do) respond. There are also issues in terms of consistency of questionnaire administration across sites, as this administration was dependent on assistance from key User Voice team members (who may have introduced the forms to potential respondents differently, for example). But the research team worked closely with User Voice staff to try to reduce possible differences in approach.

Unfortunately, the numbers involved did not allow for a meaningful comparison of respondents and non-respondents for either of the main questionnaires, and so it is difficult to quantify potential bias here.

It is worth noting that where evaluation resource limitations require the active participation and cooperation of service delivery staff in the distribution and collection of questionnaires, it is often the case that researchers need to work hard to maintain positive relationships with those staff members and in some cases to work with an organisational ethos or culture which is for obvious reasons not focused primarily on issues concerning the quality and consistency of data collection. That process can be labour-intensive and progress is often incremental, but the team has been impressed with the dedication, commitment and cooperation of key User Voice staff members whose assistance was essential for us to secure particular strands of the evaluation dataset. Although the latter does have some gaps or shortcomings, the period of the evaluation has also seen considerable movement toward what we would regard as an ‘evaluation-friendly’ organisational ethos.

2.4.4 Stability/consistency of the User Voice delivery model

The team was aware from the outset that the implementation of User Voice work might not only vary across sites because of differences in context and history, but that the Council model itself was also not completely fixed. Where multi-site interventions are made as part of a wider programme but vary from site to site, this can make it more difficult to be specific about how ‘the intervention’ should be understood or defined, and those difficulties can be compounded where delivery models themselves change during a period of evaluation. Issues of this kind can in turn complicate efforts to understand causality and describe impact, and therefore to assess the costs and benefits of the work being evaluated.

In practice however we did not find the sort of variation we had expected, and although there were obviously some variations in approach (and different dynamics due to the involvement of different staff teams and participants), key aspects of the User Voice model that we have outlined in the report (e.g. in Chapter 3) were present across sites and overall, the activities being evaluated tended to ‘cohere’ as identifiable ‘User Voice interventions’.

2.4.5 Issues concerning the counterfactual

It is clearly of key importance within any evaluation that the design allows the researchers to understand the counterfactual, or ‘what would have happened anyway’ in the areas where the relevant interventions were made. Within the research team’s original proposal it was not intended that control or comparison groups be used in relation to User Voice participants (despite wanting to interview non-participants in both prison and community settings), but more broadly, the team has taken a number of steps to address these issues.

A mixed methods approach helps to reduce the scope for threats to validity where solid controls are not possible, by allowing researchers to triangulate across multiple data sources – to assess the extent to which they can be said to ‘point in the same direction’ in terms of evidence of impact. The team has also attempted to anchor the work in the wider literature

wherever possible, and to use both comparison datasets from other research, and specific comparators where these have been available – in relation to assessment of performance indicator data. For example, we have tried to draw comparisons between User Voice prisons in particular, and non-User Voice ‘comparator’ prisons that are like the prisons of interest in key respects.

CHAPTER THREE: THE DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF THE COUNCIL MODEL

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores stakeholder views of the origins and operation of the Councils. The chapter draws on the qualitative data collected from scoping interviews, interviews with operational and senior staff within the prisons, CRCs and User Voice, and Council members in prison and in the community. In all such interviews, the research team sought views and experiences of Council implementation and operational aspects, its intended (and at times unintended) outcomes, and the dynamics of the process of participation by all involved.

3.2 THE ORIGINS OF THE MODEL

The first time ever in [the prison’s] history since 1847, we had a group of prisoners address the full staff meeting (Scoping interview 1).

Reviews of different models or approaches to service user involvement in the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Clinks, 2010, 2011) indicate a gap in *formal mechanisms* through which the voices of service users could be heard and responded to. These reviews observe that while prisons have been using some form of consultative user group for a number of years, there are few consultative or advocacy-oriented service user groups in community-based services and giving prisoners and service users a meaningful voice in criminal justice ‘service provision’ has only recently gained traction in policy circles.

One Clinks review (2011: 16) concluded that in the long term, ‘service user involvement was felt to have the potential to transform enduring aspects of the culture within prisons and community based services by, for example, reducing the ‘us/them’ tension between staff and service users and the propensity for suspicion and fear’. Other outcomes included ‘a sense of community and responsibility’ and a ‘greater transparency to decision making’ which helped ‘service users to understand the factors that influence all aspects of their lives’ (ibid: 49). The review further argued that ‘offenders are a source of ideas, creativity and direct experience of NOMS services and service user involvement should be a priority for every prison and probation trust’ (ibid: 5). In sum, user involvement was considered to improve operational outcomes in terms of the way services are designed and delivered, but also contributed to more substantive outcomes such as supporting compliance and reducing re-offending. Moreover, staff recognised that there were affective outcomes for those involved, including improved self-esteem, self-respect and confidence.

Within the prison environment in particular, despite the focus on containment and the deprivation of liberty, there is an increasing awareness that ‘prison culture’ needs to change to encompass what one scoping interview respondent described as: ‘shared responsibility

for policy’. In echoes of Lord Woolf’s (1991) proposals, the unanimous feeling amongst stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the User Voice model was that meaningful consultation with prisoners meant a safer prison environment and a more compliant prisoner population; and that the existing penal ‘culture’ had to change:

[W]e just didn’t consult prisoners. The prison service was a massive machine that was run top down and that was the same with us consulting with staff. There was very little bottom up consultation. So we were starting to do things like listen to... staff, asking them for their opinions, even asking them how we should do things, and that was reaping benefits. But there was a huge gap... even before we started doing that with staff, people were saying we should consult with prisoners (Scoping interview 1).

User Voice was acutely aware of these shortcomings within the Prison Service, not least given that many of its own staff (and all of its practitioners) had previously been subject to criminal justice system interventions. The origins of the Council model thus lay in this awareness of shortcomings in a system which is designed primarily to work ‘*on*’ rather than ‘*with*’ its intended audience – namely offenders, and Councils were proposed by User Voice as a means of changing the dynamic between service users and ‘agents of the state’.

3.3 THE PURPOSE OF USER VOICE COUNCILS

Perceptions of the purposes of User Voice Councils by both senior management and practitioners working in prisons/CRCs were to provide a formalised structure through which the voices of prisoners and service users could be channelled to facilitate a two-way consultative process, primarily between service users/prisoners and senior management. The Council model is generally construed as a mechanism for ‘bridging the gap between the service users and service providers’ (User Voice Staff, Area B). The overarching objective of this dialogic process, articulated across the professional staff groups and User Voice staff, is to work collaboratively to improve how services operate, informed by an understanding of how they are experienced, which was widely considered to generate mutually beneficial outcomes for both service providers and service users.

Well, [the purpose is] to bring to our attention issues that are raised by service users around service delivery, so ultimately, it’s to improve the service delivery of the CRC in a number of ways (CRC Staff, Area B).

To make change and to improve the lives of everybody in this community, staff and prisoners. It’s not just for the benefit of prisoners. I think if we can do something that does enhance and benefit prisoners’ lives, then that helps us, the staff, as well (Prison Officer, Area C).

The majority view was that the purpose of the Councils, irrespective of whether in the community or in prisons, was to enable members to have a legitimate voice within the formal structure of an external organisation:

[The purpose is] to basically give prisoners a more organised voice about issues that are impacting on them within the establishment. To give them a vehicle to directly access the governor and the senior managers to get something done about those issues (Governor, Area B).

Councils give members a platform, 'a recognisable voice' as one CRC senior manager described it; they also offer personal development to participants and enable 'co-production'. In terms of personal development, one prison Governor described the Council as supporting the rehabilitative process:

[G]etting these lads to kind of articulate and put things in a different way... making them be less impulsive and more planned and having good positive engagement with managers and staff (Governor, Area B).

However, for prisons, the pragmatic benefits of consultation or co-production were evident in how governors described the purpose of the Prison Councils, including the benefits of Councils in a climate of prison staff and budget cuts, reducing prisoner disquiet and disaffection, creating a legitimate channel (perhaps ironically) for the *prison Governor's voice* to be heard, and changing prison culture to one of mutual respect:

The issue about less staff around means that you need [prisoners] to be able to solve issues for themselves, take away that helplessness, that type of thing... there's a lot of people [have] probably got into getting prisoners involved in running prisons now because they've been forced to because they haven't got the staff (Governor, Area C).

I would use it for the downward communication as much as the upward communication... if it's just a case of a demand session... give me, give me, give me, I'm not particularly interested in that. There are lots of ways they can do that. If it's a way of having a meaningful dialogue about what our *shared* interests are and about *how we can support each other* in delivering that, then I'm very interested in that (Governor, Area C, emphasis added).

For CRCs, the co-productive approach underpinning the User Voice Council model was seen as even stronger than in prisons, and perhaps more ideologically than pragmatically driven, not least given the recent Transforming Rehabilitation changes across Probation services during the period of the fieldwork for this study. One of the key messages from some of the newly formed private consortia that manage the recent CRCs is that service users are 'customers' and their voices are paramount to the smooth running and future development of the service:

The first purpose of the Council is for us to consult recipients of our services on how we do and how we could do it better... doing things together (CRC, Area C).

It's so powerful and so effective to have a service user come and say 'well look, you may have produced all this but this isn't right, this isn't going to work'... there are so many small things that we don't get right that can have a big impact... I feel there's a

huge difference in the organisation since the Council came along... there is a real acceptance that service users are an important part of our business... they're our customer (CRC, Area A).

Despite service users not finding the term 'customer' helpful, they did appreciate the fact that there was a genuine wish to involve them in policy and practice development. They spoke of having their voice heard and getting opinions across as well as being able to achieve change. Whilst in prison, many Council participants suggested that membership of the Council helped them to cope with being incarcerated, whilst the Community Councils, as one participant in Area C suggested, helped 'provide some sort of soft landing' for those coming 'through the gate'.

However, on occasions, some Council members voiced concerns about being 'used' or working beyond the remit of a Council member, because of the emphasis on consultation. Likewise, some senior managers spoke of having to 'rein in' staff who may depend too much on Council members for advice and feedback. However, this seemingly increased priority to gain service user feedback, whilst greatly welcomed, is inevitably partly a by-product of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda where the Council member's role has become one of a sounding board or even, as one CRC senior manager suggested, as a means of 'road testing' potential new policies, as much as a consultative forum in its own right.

3.4 THE COUNCIL MODEL IN OPERATION

In Chapter 1, we gave a brief overview of how the Councils operated in practice, although acknowledged that practice varied from area to area and setting to setting. Overall, the experience of the rationale for and operation of the Council meetings was seen by all concerned as both inspirational and positive. Whilst the views and experiences of service users involved in the Councils is given greater coverage in the following chapter, here we focus on the views of professionals in both CRCs and prisons, where there was broad agreement that the model of Community and Prison Councils was unique and highly effective, not only as a means of improving services but also as a means of personal development for its members:

I've seen people who couldn't open their mouth.... who then suddenly became articulate and enthusiastic... it's amazing really (CRC, Area C).

I'd say that the experience is positive. People do use words like 'refreshing' and 'being inspired' (CRC Staff, Area B).

It's comfortable. People don't feel as if it's hierarchical at all, that everybody's there just as the person they are and that everybody has the opportunity to discuss and people can disagree (CRC Staff, Area C).

It's very good, it's very structured. They've done their research, they've come up, they talk about issues. Everybody's sort of – it's all done very respectfully... The Councils themselves have been very constructive and very productive (Prison governor, Area B).

The CRCs regretted not being able to join forces with the recently modified National Probation Service (NPS) in local areas, resulting mainly from the latter being too focused on their revised workload with high risk offenders. Certainly, CRCs found it difficult to manage a Council which excluded service users supervised by NPS staff, not least when they often shared the same building, and hence operational staff (and Council members) struggled to know which service users were being supervised by which agency.

Whilst the User Voice model was highly praised, there were some concerns about the quality of management by User Voice personnel who maybe lacked business acumen when it came to discussing and implementing contracts with different services. One CRC respondent suggested that User Voice needed to be more ‘commercially savvy’ and ‘more sophisticated’ about stating clearly what their model entailed and what it would cost, as well as being more flexible in the differing contexts of prison and community, as one CRC representative explained:

... this might be a different conversation with prisons because I think one of the things [User Voice managers] probably need to do is differentiate their product better between what they can offer in the community and what they can offer in prisons because... they do offer something quite immediate actually [in prisons]... because it's a closed institution, it's much more coherent... For a community based organisation, it's harder actually to define (CRC, Area B).

Some governors went further in suggesting that the model needed to be more flexible and indeed strategic in prisons compared with in the community. Equally, some senior managers stated that they would prefer more flexibility within the model so as to take into consideration the different cultures, needs and aspirations of the various CRCs and prisons.

I think if this model is gonna develop, then it does need to become more proactive than reactive and look at – OK, so how can we build on the progress we've made to actually engage Councils in some way, shape or form in the business planning process and in how we actually co-design the delivery of our services. That would be – for me, that's the ideal, that's where I'd like us to get to but we're a long way from it (CRC Senior Manager, Area B).

... could we use User Voice to be far more strategic... about how you develop the prison... So the PIDs [Prisoner Information Desks] was very much about operational issues, pretty short term type of policies that they wanted changing, that type of thing. And User Voice actually went down that track and I said, well, sorry but I can get that myself, I've already got that, I've got systems to look at that... I'm more interested in... a bit of blue sky thinking... policy decisions and service developments that we want to introduce which actually frankly are for prisoners that aren't in the establishment now and to get them thinking slightly different and I thought there was more of a role for that. But to be fair, the model was very much about quick wins and I didn't think – if I'm gonna be honest with you – I didn't think User Voice were on the same page as where I was (Prison governor, Area C).

As the above quotation illustrates, some prisons had what they deemed to be ‘similar’ or ‘alternative’ initiatives running concurrently with the User Voice Prison Councils. These alternative structures were variously referred to as Prisoner Information Desks (PIDs), Prisoner Consultative Committees (PCCs) or Prisoner Consultative Groups (PCGs). PIDs (run by prisoners themselves) tend to deal with more administrative, ‘local’ wing-based and personal issues (i.e. applications, letters and toiletries) rather than strategic and collective operational concerns. What differentiates User Voice from these alternative structures is that while these alternative structures are associated with identifying problems, the User Voice Councils are associated with finding solutions. Critically, most of these alternative structures have, reportedly, not historically benefited from senior management ‘buy in’ which might account for their problem oriented rather than solution-focused approach.

PCG is about the niggles day to day, the things on the wings...the day to day...but the difference with User Voice is they will come up with a solution to try and resolve it in partnership – at PCG they just moan...PCG is more about letting them spout off to be honest (Prison Officer, Area B).

User Voice will be ‘how could we do things differently? Let’s look at things from a different angle’. PID looks at problems and maybe comes up with suggestion...Whereas User Voice looks at an area and thinks, how can this benefit not just us but the whole [establishment] (Prison Officer, Area C).

Nevertheless, prison officers more readily recognise the direct benefits for them of the work of the PIDs than they do that of the User Voice Prison Councils – not least as PIDs undertake administrative tasks that would otherwise fall to prison officers to address, and because there is a perception among some officers that the User Voice Council, by contrast, generates more rather than less work for them.

The PIDs...do a lot of – I’m not saying menial tasks but they do more of the administration work for us which has freed up a lot of time for staff to do other things... I can’t see how they’re [User Voice] gonna make my life as a prison officer easier...we get *more* work through them (Prison Officer, Area C).

However, as will be seen in Chapter 6, senior managers within the prison environment in particular often fail to make the distinction between User Voice Councils and other means of addressing prisoner concerns. Despite these alternative initiatives being more about resolving personal rather than public issues, there was nevertheless talk among senior managers of duplication and thus a sense of unnecessary additional expense incurred by funding User Voice Councils (see Chapter 6). Respondents in the senior management interviews did recognise, however, the unique role that User Voice Councils had as being user-led but wanted them to be more strategic, ‘diagnostic’ and ‘tailored’ – which the other consultative fora were not designed to be:

I think there is a different dimension to ex-offenders doing it and I get that and I think we should welcome that and we shouldn’t discourage it. I think we just need to do it in a different way and I think probably more of a diagnostic type of approach

and then once you've got the diagnostic, you could then look at probably tailored interventions to the establishment based on what you found (Governor, Area C).

This belief that User Voice Councils could be even more distinctive and helpful within the prison context at least is discussed further in Chapter 7.

3.5 CHALLENGES TO THE OPERATION OF THE COUNCIL

3.5.1 *Publicity and presentations*

Central to obtaining staff and service user/prisoner buy in to the Council model is effective dissemination or communication of outcomes which is an area in which most of the people we interviewed in this group felt that practice may be improved. Different areas and sites have developed different approaches to disseminating outcomes. For example, prison staff in Area C and Area A referred to the use of a kiosk, a personalised electronic system through which, for example, minutes of Council meetings were disseminated; however, in one focus group discussion, it was suggested that limited time on the Kiosk system meant that people bypassed the Council notices in order to 'go to the more important things for themselves, canteen and visits, etc' (Focus Group member, Area C). Newsletter, posters and word of mouth seem to be the primary vehicle for dissemination of outcomes to service users in some of the service user Council areas and email bulletins or reports placed in a staff magazine were identified as means of notifying CRC staff.

However, in general, the dissemination process was felt to be relatively informal and largely unstructured. Good publicity and dissemination encourages buy in which enhances the perceived credibility and efficacy of the User Voice Council model. By the same token, buy in by operational staff in turn enables the implementation of changes and also contributes to outcomes; although *not* if the first time that some ground staff are made aware of these changes is 'through the grapevine' in passing discussions with prisoners or service users.

Some professional respondents noted that the initial marketing and presentations for the Councils were at times inappropriate or got the 'backs up' of staff, and this did not help develop a rapport and understanding amongst staff of the benefits of Prison or Community Councils or the ethos of User Voice more generally.

Sometimes one of the tensions has been the notion of 'only offenders can stop offending', which is true but that can sometimes be interpreted [as] professionals involved in criminal justice are wasting their time unless they've got – unless they've been a service user themselves or have got a service user involvement in their case and that's quite challenging for practitioners who have a lot of experience, perhaps may feel they've had a lot of success. And I understand what User Voice – why they use that sort of mantra but I think they'd be as well having another look at it.... they've done presentations and that's been quite successful. But sometimes they can come across as 'without us, you're kind of useless' (CRC, Area B).

In terms of publicity, service users commented – and service providers agreed – that publicity about the positive impact of User Voice Councils on policy and practice was

needed, not just within geographical areas but also between them. For example, one comment was that there could be a national leaflet produced for all prisons which had User Voice Councils, so that good news could be shared and lessons learnt from other areas.

3.5.2 *The pace of change*

There was some criticism of the slowness with which proposals were implemented, not only from service users but also from governors and CRC personnel who felt that some proposals took a long time to negotiate, not least when meetings were only held irregularly, often monthly in prisons or monthly in the community. One Community Council participant elaborated on this frustration:

I think from when I started until now, I think it could have progressed a little bit further ... Some of the things that we present to the Council, it feels as though I'm just going round on a magical roundabout, that all these things are getting brought up every single time (Community Council interviewee, Area C).

One Community Council participant reiterated this, suggesting that more support was needed from probation to implement change and keep the Council and its efforts moving in a positive direction:

What do we need from the probation office? We need regular meetings, we need good feedback, we need points that we've made, we'd like to see things implemented, you know. So we don't want to keep meeting the Council and keep on having to go over the same thing over again. (Community Council interviewee, Area B)

Linked to the above was an additional frustration about bureaucratic 'red tape' impeding progress. Part of this was due to the structural changes taking place in the community as an outcome of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda. But one Community Council participant indicated that the move to CRCs was being used as an excuse to delay Council proposals:

All I can really do is gather feedback from the service users, take it to the – you know, the CRC and then wait to see what they say. There's such a lot of red tape ... We've started a couple of projects and just everything gets put on hold until they see what [the new CRC does] (Community Council interviewee, Area C).

One Governor mentioned a 'pre-meeting' that was held with User Voice staff to try to pave the way for a smoother running Council meeting the following day, and this speeded up the process. Certainly there were hopes that User Voice staff could be more proactive rather than reactive in this process of identifying and implementing proposals and developing the Council, and 'not just facilitating the meeting and getting reps on board, taking the votes, but actually enabling the Council to do their work... taking ownership of the whole thing' (Governor, Area B). Likewise, service user respondents also desired greater engagement from and continuity of staff and for them to have a more 'hands on' role. Several felt underutilised and that their skills, talents, and dedication were not being put to good use. Part of this was attributed to the way the Council meetings were run – 'we just kind of show up and make recommendations [based on service user feedback in the surgeries] but we

can't do much more than that'. Working constructively with, and alongside, prison staff and offender managers (rather than just 'reporting to' them) was a hope for many of the council members, and was seen as a way to expedite and sustain improvements in services, as well as foster co-productive practices.

3.5.3 *The logistics of Council activities*

Different establishments and settings bring different challenges to the logistics of running the Council model. Such challenges include, for example, the extent to which both User Voice staff and Council members can move around the prison to engage with other prisoners, or restrictions on the number of prisoners who can meet at any one time for the purpose of conducting Council business, or sustaining a target Council membership in prisons despite a rapidly changing population.

Instead of focusing on the group of lads you've got together, you're sorta pressurised to bring in more numbers and keep the parties like full. And then it's down to security [screening]... There's lots of people want to be involved but they just don't pass security... I think you need to forsake numbers for quality (User Voice Staff, Area C).

By contrast, engaging and retaining Council members in the community is differently challenging because 'as things change in their lives, so does their availability' (CRC Staff, Area B).

It takes a different kind of commitment [in the community] because, in prison, you stand to gain from being a Council member. It will count – it just looks good on the prison CV and you get some privileges as well... in the community I think it takes more of a commitment to get out of bed and take the bus and go to where you need to be (User Voice Volunteer, Area B).

Other operational challenges include ensuring that prisoners, service users and staff understand the model, its purpose and its focus.

I think that you have challenges with [service users] either not really understanding what the brand is about or what the Council is about, so that's an ongoing challenge just to kind of bring everybody back on task... You have challenges ensuring that staff are aware of the work that you're doing (User Voice Staff, Area A).

In some institutions, there was a sense that the majority of staff and a number of prisoners were unaware of the role and purpose of User Voice, which was attributed to poor communication but which, in the case of prisoners at least, was also a consequence of a rapidly changing prison population.

[A short term prison] makes it difficult to keep the message of the Prison Council and User Voice current on everybody's minds (Prison Officer, Area A).

There's nothing publicised...I don't think it is a case of staff don't realise what User Voice does and what it provides, I don't think a lot of prisoners do either (Prison Officer, Area C).

I don't even know if there's 50 per cent [of prison officers] know what we're about (User Voice Staff, Area C).

Council participants also discussed some frustrations and challenges to the operation of the Council model. There were more frustrations expressed, or disadvantages identified, by Community Council participants than Prison Council members. This is most likely due to the nature of the populations engaged (a 'captive audience' in prisons versus those in the community with more demanding schedules and other commitments) and how the Council is structured (i.e. Prison Council members meet weekly with Engagement Team Members, whereas Community Council members may only attend one meeting each month).

Other challenges for Council members included engaging those potential service users who are not ready to engage: 'some people are too aggressive', and several Council members did not feel adequately equipped or trained to handle sensitive issues or escalating behaviour.

3.6 THE DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATION

User Voice staff are keen to ensure that Council members are as representative of the wider user group as possible – but not just in terms of ensuring that the Council reflects the majority demographic in the community within which they work (whether prison or CRC) but ensuring that it includes representation from different minority groups:

We really need to have the voice of everyone ...I feel that what makes it more effective is that we have a diverse make up, so we have people from all different... ethnic backgrounds, different criminal behaviours, different age groups, male, female, and I think that...when that's happening, that shows we're doing a good job because we're reaching out to probably groups that people or services can't normally reach out to or engage with (User Voice Staff, Area B).

I always ensure that I have different people from different sections of the service user community on the Council, so I make sure that women are represented, men, the older offenders, black, white, gay, LGBT, people with learning disabilities' (User Voice Staff, Area C).

In addition to this drive for diversity, prospective Prison Council members are subject to a vetting process, which can not only target diverse populations but can also limit them. In terms of who gets accepted onto the Prison Councils, it tends to be 'trusted' prisoners – which, it seems, is less about 'cherry picking' and more about cooperating with institutional security and safety concerns and procedures.

The guys who are on User Voice are already enhanced...I'm not gonna use the worst guy in the prison to be User Voice cos he's gonna be a nightmare, so you get figureheads who are already role model prisoners...they're already being used for

being a listener, they're already used for a cleaner, they're already enhanced cos of his behaviour. So why not naturally gravitate towards that guy making a figurehead for User Voice cos everyone knows him already and he's a role model (Prison Officer, Area B).

If prisoners are known to be bullies, if prisoners are known to deal in drugs...discipline issues...we have to be careful who we let in because we've gotta look at the safety of all individuals on the Council (Prison Officer, Area C).

Prison Council participants, from the sample of interviewees and those surveyed, were predominantly 'settled' prisoners. They were older, serving long(er) sentences, were fairly well engaged with prison programming (many were also Listeners, wing representatives, or mentors in other initiatives), and nearly all were 'enhanced' prisoners, as per the Earned Incentives and Privileges (IEP) scheme. The use of this IEP structure as a guide to vetting potential Council members varied somewhat from prison to prison, but was always at the discretion of prison staff and governors rather than User Voice staff. In some prisons, a prison administrator took charge of the initial vetting (typically oriented around the prisoner's 'security risk') and would then pass those who were 'cleared' along to User Voice members for further vetting (through an application and/or an interview).

Nearly all service providers, User Voice staff and service users believed that vetting was an appropriate and useful method to ensure the Council recruited 'committed', 'high quality', and 'trustworthy' members, as well as ensuring diversity. User Voice engagement workers thought the vetting of potential Council members was useful and to some extent made their job 'easier' because they were able to recruit members who showed initiative and had a history of making positive decisions – 'they're in the right headspace'. Nearly all Council participants interviewed believed that Council participation was a privilege and were also in favour of the vetting process. Some who had achieved a 'trusted prisoner' status (for example, had a prison 'passport' which allowed them 'free access' to other halls/wings and to computers) recognised the potential precariousness of this status and feared that 'having the wrong kind of people on the council might ruin this' for those who felt they had worked hard for such status, as one Prison Council participant reiterated:

I don't know if you know but there's been – even from the initial start-up of User Voice, I mean, there's been quite – we've had a bit of a turnover of people that have been thrown off the Council because of misdemeanours (Prison Council interviewee, Area C).

3.7 PROFESSIONAL PARTICIPATION IN COUNCIL MEETINGS

Council meetings are generally well attended by both Council members and senior management in prison and in the community and, indeed, a commitment from the highest echelons of senior manager leadership to User Voice Councils was a common finding across institutional heads in all areas and across all sites. While, by contrast, prison officer participation was limited across all the prisons, some Community Councils not only encouraged but reportedly achieved attendance from quite a diverse professional group –

including operational staff (although one CRC area would have preferred more third sector representatives on the Council):

We try to encourage all staff to attend, so case administrators, receptionists, offender managers, senior probation officers (CRC Staff, Area B).

Depending on the proposal, [CRC managers] will then decide who needs to be at that meeting so it varies from one month to another...if it's to do with community payback, they get the community payback officer in... they're quite proud of it [the Council]... there's always quite a high number of staff (User Voice Staff, Area C).

However, limited participation by operational staff in the Councils was generally attributed to reduced staffing levels and increased workloads: 'A lot of [staff] really wanna go but they just can't cos of their workload (CRC Staff, Area B). In a prison context, with severe cuts to staff and other resources, it was suggested that the prison officers that did attend were told to do so by the Governor/Director for specific reasons. But there was resentment by some prison staff that prisoners were getting prime time with the Governor when they did not: 'A User Voice member probably gets more time with the Governor than I get' (Prison Officer, Area B).

While increasing buy-in from operational staff was generally viewed as advantageous, one prison officer suggested that increased participation in the Council meetings by prison officers was not necessarily desirable - not least because the establishment of a *core* group of Council members and professional staff who knew and trusted each other was considered central to its efficacy. It was suggested that too many prison officers in attendance or different faces each week could undermine or negatively affect Council dynamics.

I think if you have a lot of staff coming... it will change the dynamics...there has to be a great deal of trust both ways and I think if you have total strangers come in every week, the [Council] will start to be quiet. They'll clam up...too many...could be overpowering...To get to the level we're at, it's had to take a great deal of trust on both sides and a lot of familiarity without crossing any lines...trust is built both ways (Prison Officer, Area C).

However, this may also illustrate a sense of wanting to protect the privileged status that some prison officers feel they have through being involved in the Councils, with their greater access to senior management as a result of their facilitation role. Nevertheless, as the following section on staff resistance suggests, there is a need for greater communication and involvement of ground staff to ensure the smooth running and development of the User Voice Councils generally.

3.8 STAFF RESISTANCE, DISTRUST AND RESENTMENT

Echoing the findings from the Isle of Wight pilots discussed in Chapter 1 (see User Voice, 2010) as well as others' experiences of introducing co-productive practices more broadly (Bovaird, 2007; Crawford et al. 2004; Smith, 2005), it was anticipated that councils led by service users would not be universally welcomed. There was a fear amongst some stakeholders interviewed in this evaluation that user participation to the extent suggested by the Councils would be met with resistance by staff, not least given the traditional culture of top-down intervention within the criminal justice arena generally, but more specifically in a prison environment:

[S]ome staff will hate the idea, will despise the idea, will try to do it down, and some prisoners likewise but mainly staff because... of envy, because of suspicion and all of the other human elements, but the fact is some staff will be totally against the concept... I would be fully naïve if I said everyone... thinks it's the best thing since sliced bread (Scoping interview 2).

Likewise, there was an assumption that concepts such as participation or empowerment were alien not only to staff but also to prisoners.

[Prisoners are] used to being told what they're going to do and told what to do... most of them, I'd say, are not accustomed to somebody putting themselves forward as their representative and serving to hear their concerns and to voice those concerns (Scoping interview 3).

The same could also apply to service users, given the power dynamics involved in the regulation of punishment through supervision in the community. In two community focus group discussions, people expressed surprise at the level of empowerment they felt by being listened, often for the first time:

[T]he first thing I went to was the Headquarters... it was quite empowering cos obviously you go through probation and kind of feeling like not really being listened to or anything. Like to go there, then, you know, you get Heads of certain probation areas and stuff and then they just listen to you, do you know what I mean, when you're sat around the table and take notes, and they just respond to you on the same kinda level as you, [it] is quite empowering... it just felt really good (Focus group member, Area B).

[User Voice] gives people on... the wrong side of the fence access to people that normally would not ever give them the time of day. Like I got to go to some big massive meeting with seniors of probation, the Head of probation, the lady that runs the whole show, yeah, and normally I wouldn't have access to her (TALKING AT SAME TIME) even if I was employed by probation, I'd never have access to her (Focus Group member, Area A).

However, central to the effective implementation, operation and outcomes of the User Voice Council model is not only senior management and service user buy in but also ground

staff buy in and ownership. However, whilst the Councils were intended for ‘everybody’, the extent to which this purpose is realised in practice is constrained, in certain contexts, by the absence of ‘buy-in’ from operational staff and, as part of that, the limited participation of operational staff in Council meetings. Across all three areas and within both prison and community contexts, but perhaps more acutely in the prison context, staff reported varying degrees of resistance to the implementation of the Council model. However, there were pockets of good practice where prison officers perhaps felt less need to attend meetings (even if they had the time to do so) because they could also feed their views back to Council representatives just as fellow prisoners did, as one Focus Group respondent suggested:

There’s more staff now that’ll speak to you... they’ll give you information about what’s going on or situations that they’re not happy with, because they understand and accept now that you’re not dropping names if you go raising questions [with the Governor/Director]. So there’s more and more of them coming round to accepting what you’re doing because you’ve got that access to management on a monthly basis, something that they struggle to have... we’re there to take staff issues forward as well as we take prisoners’ views forward (Focus Group member, Area C).

For example, if User Voice Engagement Team Members carry keys in prison, representing as it does the trust placed in them by prison management, this could generate resentment amongst some prison officers. It blurred the perceived difference between prison officers and User Voice staff, if not also, symbolically, the difference between prison officers and prisoners – not least because some User Voice staff were formerly incarcerated in the institutions in which they now worked. While conveying trust from senior management in prison, in a culture historically characterised by a level of distrust, this symbol of institutional trust equally detracted – in the early days at least – from User Voice staff’s perceived trustworthiness, not only amongst operational staff but also amongst prisoners.

We had to try and overcome staff’s attitudes and prisoners’ attitudes. One of the big things we initially had to deal with was...the User Voice representative, who is an ex-offender...walking round with keys and a lot of staff in the early stages were very – I wouldn’t say resentful but didn’t agree with it. Some of the prisoners also resented [name] cos they used to think cos he’s an ex-offender but now he’s got keys he’s on the staff side, he wants to represent them. Again, in time, they’ve come to realise that [name] represents everybody...he’s here to assist with the smooth running of the Council and making it a better place to live and work (Prison officer, Area C).

But this distrust was not altogether unique to the prison context.

There were initially teething problems from staff because there was an element of distrust...it was the first time that we’d actually engaged in...bringing service users into the office and actually listening to them (CRC Staff, Area B).

The explanations that the people we spoke to offered for this distrust, hostility and resistance included a lack understanding of the purpose of the Councils and the potential outcomes. People were ‘sceptical of...empowerment for prisoners’ (Prison Staff, Area C); and hostilities generated by a ‘them and us’ mentality (Volunteer, Area B). There was an

implied fear of not only what the implementation of the Council represented but what former prisoners with keys or service users who now sat 'round the table' (CRC Staff, Area B) represented in terms of blurring these boundaries and shifting traditional power relations.

I actually remember a probation officer telling me that they'd heard amongst their own staff...that staff didn't like the idea of ex-offenders walking into their probation office telling them how to do their jobs (User Voice Staff, Area B).

A further explanation for the resentment that some professionals exhibited towards the introduction of the User Voice Council related to staff perceptions of a lack of voice. Indeed, some staff in both CRCs and prisons felt that nobody was listening to them and they felt that they had no substantive channel through which to express their voice:

You've got a lot saying, well why are [prisoners] getting listened to when nobody bothers listening to us? (Prison Officer, Area B).

There's a question – do you feel that you're listened to, cared for, that your concerns are acted on, do senior managers take note, all those questions. And a significant number say no. (CRC Staff, Area B).

However, alongside other frustrations, where prison officers perceived the User Voice Council as a *Prisoner* rather than *Prison* Council and in a perceived absence of a forum at which their concerns could be raised, some prison officers struggled to relate to, support or even identify a benefit of the Council model. One prison officer suggested that staff buy-in would be encouraged if it also addressed 'things that might be beneficial to the staff as well, so it's not all just about prisoners, it's not all prisoner led because staff do feel very undervalued at the moment, very demotivated' (Prison Officer, Area B). In area C, for example, while one prison officer suggested that 'staff have a voice' (for example through the Prison Officers Association), the Prison Council tended not to be seen as a medium for prison officer voices to be heard.

It's a *Prisoner* Council as far as I'm concerned, made up of prisoners. There doesn't seem to be any other voices heard (Prison Officer, Area C).

3.9 SUMMARY

Perceptions of the purposes of User Voice Councils were to be a legitimate and official platform for prisoner and service user voice and consultation/co-production, to provide a formalised structure through which the voices of prisoners and service users could be channelled, and to facilitate consultation between service users/prisoners and senior management. However, there was some resistance to User Voice Councils from ground staff, both in the CRCs and prison environments, resulting from a lack of 'buy in' to the rationale for such collaboration between service users and senior management and a misunderstanding of the role of User Voice staff in the process.

User Voice Councils are widely recognised by operational staff to have a distinct function from alternative structures in prison which also engage prisoners and have a more immediate administrative, problem-solving focus. Yet, it would seem that operational prison staff more readily identify with the benefits of these alternative structures which serve to alleviate the perceived workload of prison officers compared to the User Voice Councils which are perceived to add to their workload.

Overall, however, the model was seen as effective in empowering service users and offering solutions to shared problems despite some senior managers suggesting that the model lacked flexibility and a strategic focus on wider policy and practice development. The challenges to the operation of the Council model in a prison context came from restrictions that a) constrained the movement of and, thus, the capacity of Council members to engage with other prisoners; b) restrained the number of prisoners that could meet at any one time for the purpose of conducting Council business and c) limited membership on the Council in the context of rapidly changing prison populations. Within a community context, the sheer scale of the catchment area for service users within the CRCs was deemed a challenge to user involvement from diverse and hard to reach populations, as was the rapid change occurring within the CRCs as a result of the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda.

CHAPTER FOUR: USER VOICE PARTICIPANTS – ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the views and experiences of Council participants in the relevant prisons and CRC areas, specifically as they relate to User Voice's Theory of Change model and its intended outcomes. It explores the views of Council participants from interviews and focus groups conducted in prison and the community, as well as evidence from the initial and follow-up questionnaires and IOMI surveys. It also includes the views of three individuals who either voluntarily opted out of prison Council participation after some initial engagement, or had been a Council member for a very short amount of time. This chapter is structured around the following Theory of Change indicators: motivations for engagement, impacts on personal development, skills development, access to positive role models and the value of positive peer networks, active citizenship, and involvement and desistance.

One of the most significant and meaningful themes to emerge from the views and experiences of Council members was their shared sense of satisfaction from helping others. 'Leaving a legacy' was often used to describe their motivations for engagement, sustaining Council involvement, and creating a hopeful outlook for the future. There was an underlying tone of generativity from participant responses, as they talked about 'giving back' by leaving behind a positive legacy in the form of a 'more humane' or progressive system. Generativity features prominently in the desistance literature as a vital component to 'moving forward' and 'moving on' from a criminal past. Generativity has been defined as:

The concern for and commitment to promoting the next generation, manifested through parenting, teaching, mentoring, and generating products and outcomes that aim to ... foster the development and wellbeing of individuals and social systems that will outlive the self (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1998, quoted in Maruna 2001: 99).

Maruna's (2001) work observed that desisting offenders benefited from involvement in 'generative activities'. Such activities make a contribution to the wellbeing of others, and enable the individual to develop a sense of purpose and meaning. It also plays a part in testifying to the desister that an alternative agentic identity is being or has been forged.

4.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Motivations for joining the Council varied both within and between Community and Prison Council members. For prisoners, several themes were consistent throughout all of the interviews. Participants indicated that they hoped to improve conditions for those living and working within the establishment, with a few emphasising a desire to better the environment for the prisoners to come after (i.e., leaving a 'legacy'). Many saw Council participation as a form of 'giving back' to the prison community, while contributing to a solution-focused agenda. All interviewees felt that 'having our voice heard' was invaluable, both for being able to constructively identify problem areas in the prison (and realistic solutions to remedy or ameliorate them), but also because most felt their voices were typically silenced within the criminal justice system, and specifically within the prison setting. Many described having their voice heard as being 'instrumental' to changing things systemically, as their first-hand experience and 'local' knowledge was unparalleled, and it represented a form of recognition and validation from the authorities that prisoner voices were regarded and respected.

For several prisoners, their initial motivation for joining the Council was to understand the system better in order to navigate it more effectively, and ease their anxiety ('I wanted to understand how things work in here'). This was particularly valuable for those serving a prison sentence for the first time. Many of these same themes were echoed in the initial questionnaires. There were three primary reasons listed for why participants wanted to get involved with the Prison Council: to have a voice; to make a difference; and, to help others. Some respondents listed several reasons. The majority of responses were oriented towards others (the collective) and the prison, rather than about themselves personally. Likewise, Prison Council interviewees expressed their motivations and Council intentions in an outwardly way, and at a more macro level – they were also oriented around the collective (their 'prison community'), and improving systems and relationships, rather than just the personal. As one interviewee explained when asked why he has wanted to stay involved in the Council:

Basically to have some sort of input, to make [the prison] a better place. I mean, my party's tag line is making [the prison] a better place for all who live, work and visit it, and that is the mantra that I started with my party. So it's not just about prisoners, it's about how we intend to lend a voice to staff and to visitors because people who visit this prison should be the people we try to impress because they take the word to the community outside.... I think the Council is toward benefiting a prison population but enhancing the skills and giving people the opportunity to prove themselves. And now prison staff and User Voice staff know what I'm capable of because I can actually apply those skills in real terms and have them show results. (Prison Council interviewee, Area A)

Prison interviewees had either first heard about the Council from other prisoners (most commonly from cellmates or friends, or from seeing Council members wearing their User Voice t-shirts around the landings), or met a User Voice employee on the wings and began engagement from that interaction. Two of the HMP Oakwood members had previously participated in the HMP Birmingham Council before being transferred. One interviewee became involved after some encouragement from a prison officer:

I've never wanted to engage, discuss or talk with any member of the prison ... [but] I'll be really honest with you, one of the staff talked to me like a human being when I first came here and I'm not used to that (Prison Council interviewee, Area C).

Thematically, there was considerable variation in responses to the survey item: 'Please list the things you hope to get out of participating in the User Voice Prison Council'. These ranged from improving inter/personal skills ('more social skills and working together') and future employment prospects ('this can also be used outside prison to take on as a career'), to improving the prison and systems/conditions within it ('to achieve a properly run regime and solve underlying issues'). Many prisoners included both a personal and collective-oriented hope for the Council in their response.

Most Prison Council interviewees were not able to easily articulate the advantages (or disadvantages) of being involved in the Council, though nearly all indicated that a sense of personal satisfaction came from 'helping others' within the prison. Some also suggested that Council membership meant that staff could be more respectful towards them (in speech and behaviour), and that they were afforded some preferential treatment (for example, having considerable access around the prison and to technology, or getting a placement in a desirable workshop). In other words, they became 'trusted' within the prison.

Several said that Council participation would most likely aid them in progressing through their sentence and/or place them in a better position to get a downgrade in categorisation (specifically, from a category C to D). However, all interviewees indicated that this was not a primary motivator to joining the Council or remaining on it.

For those who had been involved with their Prison Council for a significant period of time (over one year), there was an optimistic drive despite some frustrations about periods of stagnation or lack of movement in actioning proposals. This longitudinal perspective encouraged them to continue engagement, as they had witnessed (or had directly been involved with) numerous positive changes as a result of Council initiatives. A number of interviewees in HMP Oakwood had been part of the initial Council development from 2013. Some expressed feeling a sense of 'duty' to engage in the Council in the beginning, as the prison was newly opened and had been experiencing some 'hiccups'. Prisoners felt they could make a genuine difference in assisting the prison stabilise and improve. Many of these respondents felt the Council could 'absolutely' make a difference to prison regimes: 'of course – I've seen it with my own eyes'.

Most Community Council interviewees had first heard about the User Voice Council either from their probation office or through an advertisement in their local office. Others had met

a User Voice employee who had told them about the Council, or heard about the Council through friends or word of mouth. One participant had attended an Open University conference and had encountered User Voice there. Another first became involved with User Voice after applying for a job with the organisation.

Community interviewees also varied in their motivations to become a Council member with User Voice. Many viewed it as a route toward paid employment within the organisation or as a lead-in to other opportunities. Others had become involved out of a desire to help others get out of the criminal justice system; 'to give a voice to offenders'; to 'give back to the community'; and to 'reach out to youth' via mentoring. In contrast to many of the prison Council participants who either found it difficult to articulate the advantages of participating in the Council, or viewed the advantages through a community/collective-centred lens, many of the community participants also described the personal advantages of participating in the Council. This may reflect differences in the extent to which a sense of collectivism or community is more or less evident in the different penal and geographical contexts.

It boosts me, it boosts my ego, of course it does, definitely. It gives me a boost and it makes me feel good about myself because I know like, if I can do that, I can do anything really when I think about it. If I can go into a prison and do a talk, I'm there on my own, like there's a prison officer there but like they can relate to me because I'm an ex-prisoner. It was just so enjoyable. (Community Council interviewee, Area C)

In many ways, helping others was helping themselves to feel more confident, involved, and valued. Riessman's (1965) 'helper therapy principle', for example, suggests that whatever the underpinning motive or intention, helping others helps the helper.

From the initial community questionnaires, respondents listed many different reasons for why they were motivated to get involved in the community Council. Like those interviewed, their responses were consistently about advocating for other ex-offenders, in that they wanted to use their own experiences to express empathy, while also educating and influencing ('to help offenders' rehabilitation by providing an 'experienced' voice to educate and influence service providers'). Though respondents did not explicitly state that they were motivated to join the Council in order to change the system (like prison respondents did), it is apparent from their responses that engaging with service users, and advocating for them, was part of a change process and that they themselves were change agents.

A few respondents' motivations for joining the Community Council were more instrumental (and less altruistic), or out of a need to meet order or licence conditions: 'Since I was released from prison [I] could not get employment, so probation officer suggested I do some voluntary work. It will look good on my CV'.

Although 'changing the system' was not commonly articulated as a motivator for joining the Community Council, nearly all survey respondents did have an expectation, or hope, that the Council would improve CRC services. All but three survey respondents answered 'yes' to the question 'do you expect the Council to make a difference to the way things are done in probation'. Some respondents emphasised the importance of their own ex-offender status

and how this could further facilitate engagement and change: ‘Because we believe in what we do and we are experts by experience.’

4.3 IMPACT ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Personal development is a process, and a way for people to assess their qualities, consider their aims in life (e.g. ‘being a better parent’, ‘giving back to the community’, or ‘trying to break the cycle’ of offending for others), and set goals in order to realise and maximise their potential (e.g. ‘maintaining sobriety’, completing their prison sentence plan, or ‘reconnecting with family’). It was difficult for respondents to disentangle the two, as they are often developed together and are complementary. As a result, their responses frequently included aspects of both. The vast majority of initial questionnaire respondents hoped to gain personally from participation in the Council and overall, respondents felt that Council participation had a positive impact on their personal development, specifically in terms of confidence building, growing tolerance, feeling purposeful, and creating meaning in their lives.

Staff could also see the value in participation, and the ways in which it contributed to personal development:

I think that for most Council reps, the experience is positive, it raises their self-esteem, their confidence, the ability to articulate themselves in what is quite a challenging, threatening environment...so they’re learning, they’re gaining skills of communication, soft skills if you like, that will help them to hopefully get a job at some point. And those are things we know contribute to reducing reoffending (CRC Staff, Area B).

Other professional respondents suggested that participation could engender in Council members a shift in attitude, a shift in self-perception, self-esteem and self-confidence, and a sense of purpose. In reference to one prisoner in particular, who was disabled, and who had ‘been in and out of prison his entire life’, one prison officer said that ‘his attitude and nature changed’ and that ‘it’s given him a purpose in life’.

Feeling purposeful is an important part of the desistance process, as it helps to increase self-confidence and give people meaning. Interviewees in both the community and prison highlighted this and generally felt that Council participation helped them to ‘find meaning’ in their day-to-day lives, whilst also looking toward the future. One CRC staff member in Area C also echoed the value of participation: ‘It gives people a sense of purpose. So people that have never been involved in having a say ... all of a sudden feel that, actually, there’s some input there.’

Most prison and community participants discussed the importance of improving relationships between service users and service providers. This was linked to personal development, as most believed that the reduction in relational distance between providers and users reduced stigma and helped them to feel ‘recognised’ and ‘valued’ as individuals rather than ‘offenders’. One community interviewee said s/he hoped to ‘help probation staff recognise that we’re not all monsters’, while another hoped the Council would help to

‘break down stereotypes on both sides’. Moving away from negative labels (like ‘con’ or ‘offender’) toward ‘a person of value’ was felt to be a critical component in reshaping one’s identity. Being viewed or treated ‘as an individual and not just a number’ enabled many to see their own capacity and worth:

Prison staff talk to me more like an equal now. Well, maybe not an equal, but as a person, not just an inmate ... We [with an officer] have conversations, and just banter. It’s normal – about as normal as it could ever be, but it’s just like we’re two guys on the street ... [That officer] was the one who suggested the Council to me. He had seen something in me ... thought I’d be good at it ... It makes you feel good to have someone point out your strengths, because you can’t always see them yourself, especially in a place like this [prison]. (Prison Council interviewee, Area A)

‘Empathy’ was used frequently to not only describe how Council participants felt toward other service users, but also toward prison and probation staff. In both the prison and community context, Council participants identified ‘tolerance’ as a value gained from participation in the Council.

As service users and service providers ‘got to know each other’ on a more personal or human level, some mutual trust, respect and understanding was able to grow:

What are the advantages?... Having my voice heard when I come to the Council. Because before that, probation weren’t listening to me, my probation officer was not listening to me. They seem to listen to me now they know that I’m on the User Voice Council ... They listen to me, they’re a bit more lenient now. When you’re like 5 minutes late, then before they slam the book at you. They listen to me more now. I don’t know ... They’re not so heavy-handed now. (Community Council interviewee, Area A)

Another community interviewee responded that Council attendance had given him a ‘purpose in life’ and had positively influenced how he treated others, particularly probation staff:

I don’t know if they see me differently but I see them differently, of course I do ... I’ve just got more respect for people now. I’m now like – we all have problems. No one’s perfect ... I used to hate them with a passion ... It’s just like I know they’ve had loads of casework and things like that and clients and that. I was saying this to one the other week saying like, why have you got so many clients? I was just like, have a small amount of clients and give them as much time as you can instead of just 15 minutes because in 15 minutes, you can’t do nothing, I don’t think. (Community Council interviewee, Area C)

4.3.1 Evidence from the IOMI questionnaires

Findings from our final analysis of the User Voice IOMI data are broadly in keeping with findings from other research¹⁴, although the team was initially somewhat surprised at how positive the various dimension scores appeared to be for initial IOMIs completed by User Voice participants. Initial IOMI scores are important because, in effect, they show what individuals ‘bring to the table’ when they start a programme or intervention and before the latter has had much of a chance to facilitate change or improve the individual’s circumstances. Initial IOMIs are intended to provide a snapshot of individual emotional well-being at a certain point in time, and ideally, at a point in time *before* a programme or intervention has had time to have an impact on the participant.

A comparison of initial IOMI scores across different cohorts can give some indication of the differences across such groups in terms of starting points, and the research team decided that it would be useful to compare the initial User Voice participant scores with initial scores recorded for three other groups of offenders, as detailed below¹⁵:

- Moorland prisoners – initial IOMIs completed during the period 18–23 March 2014 (n=334); (this was part of a larger test-retest exercise for the IOMI tool)¹⁶;
- Prison arts programme participants – initial IOMIs completed at start of a drama project for prisoners (n=10)¹⁷;
- Resettlement project participants – these are initial IOMIs completed by participants at the start of involvement with a project focusing on custody-leavers in a large northern city (n=57)¹⁸.

What that comparison shows is that User Voice participants for the most part have more positive initial IOMI scores than those from the other three groups referred to. Scores for the User Voice cohort suggest that this group is less impulsive, more hopeful, and more resilient than the other groups, for example, as illustrated in **Figure 2** below.

¹⁴ Although IOMI is now being used by a wide range of organisations, the literature concerning its use is so far contained in unpublished reports to funders. We are aware of comparison data from our own research with other projects, although some of the background to the tool and its development (and detailed references to test-retest IOMI data samples) are included in Maguire et al. (forthcoming) and Liddle et al. (forthcoming); the latter documents are soon to be released by the Ministry of Justice.

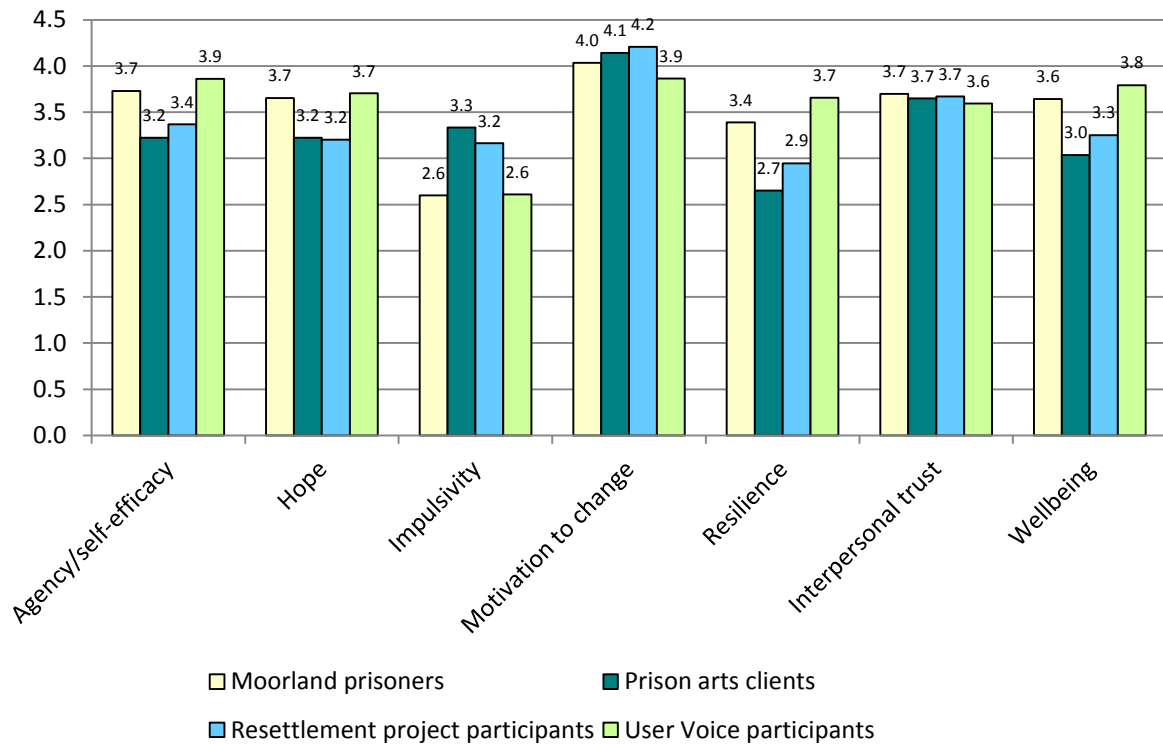
¹⁵ It can be very useful when assessing data generated by psychometric or other tools, to use comparison data to see whether score patterns conform to what has been generated by similar respondent groups in other research.

¹⁶ See Maguire et al. (forthcoming)

¹⁷ IOMI dataset provided to members of the research team; unpublished

¹⁸ IOMI dataset collected and analysed as part of a Cabinet Office-funded mentoring project evaluation; unpublished.

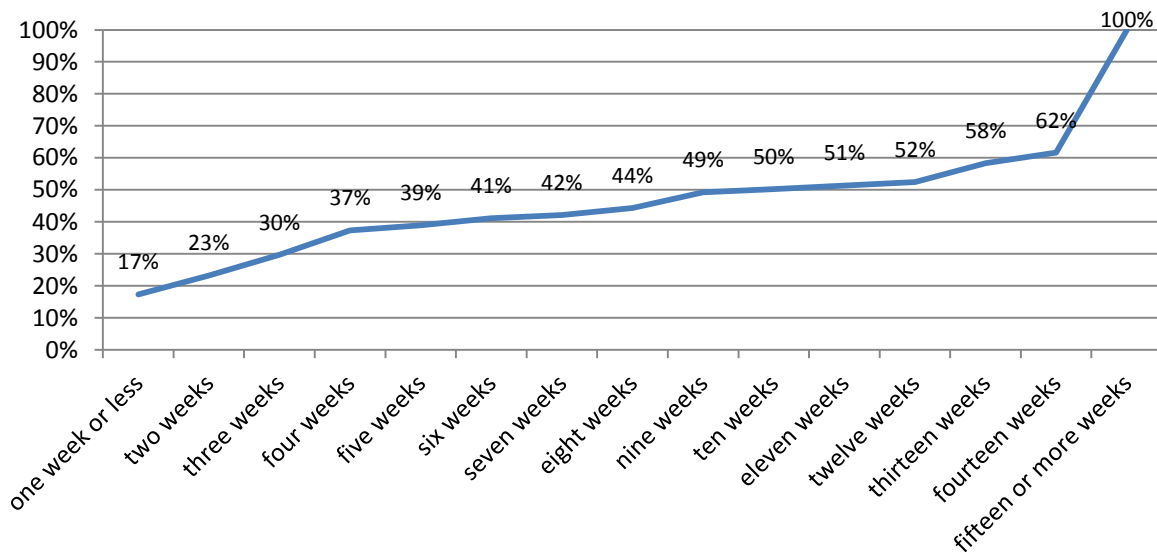
Figure 2: A comparison of initial IOMI scores for User Voice participants (using all initial IOMIs in aggregate), with scores for other offender groups



However, further analysis focusing on time periods between User Voice start dates and completion dates for the initial IOMI questionnaires indicates that dimension scores for User Voice participants are more consistent with those for other groups of offenders, than suggested in the aggregate figures in the above presentation. It was possible to establish a fairly precise measure of time between User Voice start dates and dates of completion for initial IOMIs for 185 participants, although either one or both of these dates were missing for the remaining 41 cases.

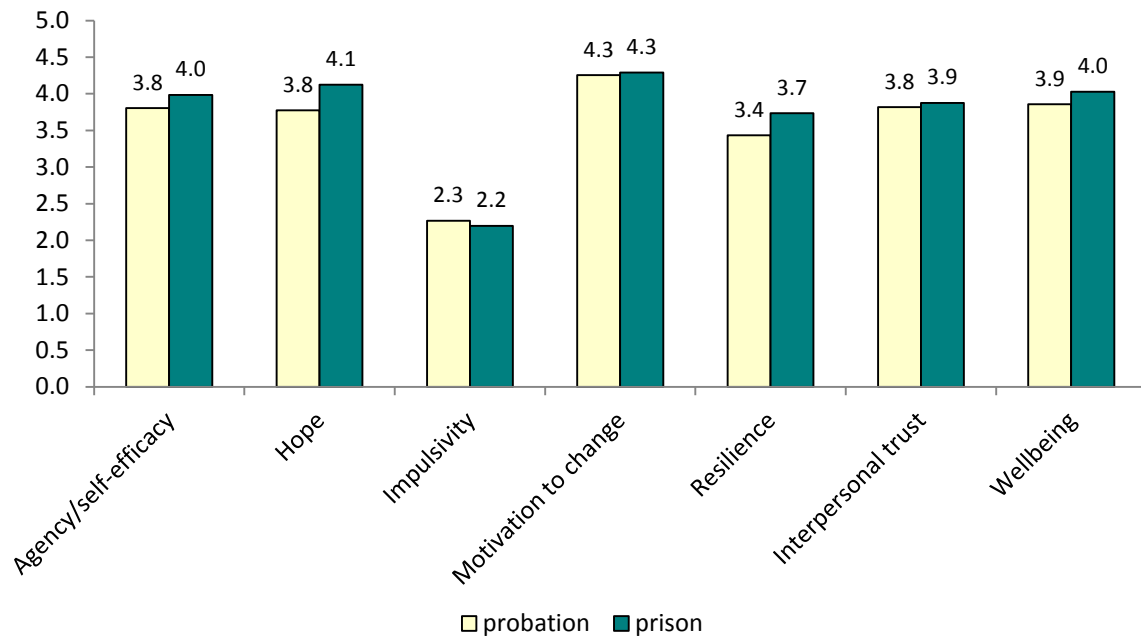
Analysis of those time periods for the 185 cases where relevant information was available, suggests that the majority did not complete their initial IOMIs until well after starting with User Voice. Fifty per cent (n=94) of User Voice participants did not complete their initial IOMI questionnaires until 10 weeks or more after they began their involvement with User Voice, 37% (n=69) completed their initial IOMIs within four weeks of starting with User Voice, and 17% (n=32), completed their initial IOMI within one week of starting with User Voice (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3: Cumulative percentage of User Voice participants completing their initial IOMIs, by number of weeks after starting with User Voice (n=185)



There were significant differences between the prison and the community groups in terms of the timing of initial IOMI completions, with the latter completing their initial IOMIs about 28 weeks after starting with User Voice, on average, and the prison group completing their initial IOMIs about 15 weeks after starting with User Voice, on average. However, the average for Community Council respondents reduces to 18 weeks when significant outliers are removed from the analysis. In particular, six Community Council respondents completed initial IOMIs after 90 weeks or more from their User Voice start dates. There were also differences between the Prison and Community Councils in terms of the dimension scores themselves for completed initial IOMIs. As **Figure 4** illustrates, initial dimension scores for the Community Council group are less positive overall than for the Prison Council group.

Figure 4: A comparison of initial IOMI dimension scores, for community (n=70) and prison (n=150) User Voice participants



These differences in initial IOMI scores may be due to the fact that not all prison participants are eligible to become involved with Prison Councils. It may be that those who are not eligible would also tend to have less positive IOMI scores, for example, and these individuals do not have an opportunity to complete an initial IOMI. The Community Councils do not have the same eligibility criteria, so one would expect that initial IOMI scores overall would be somewhat lower than the prison ones – which they do appear to be.

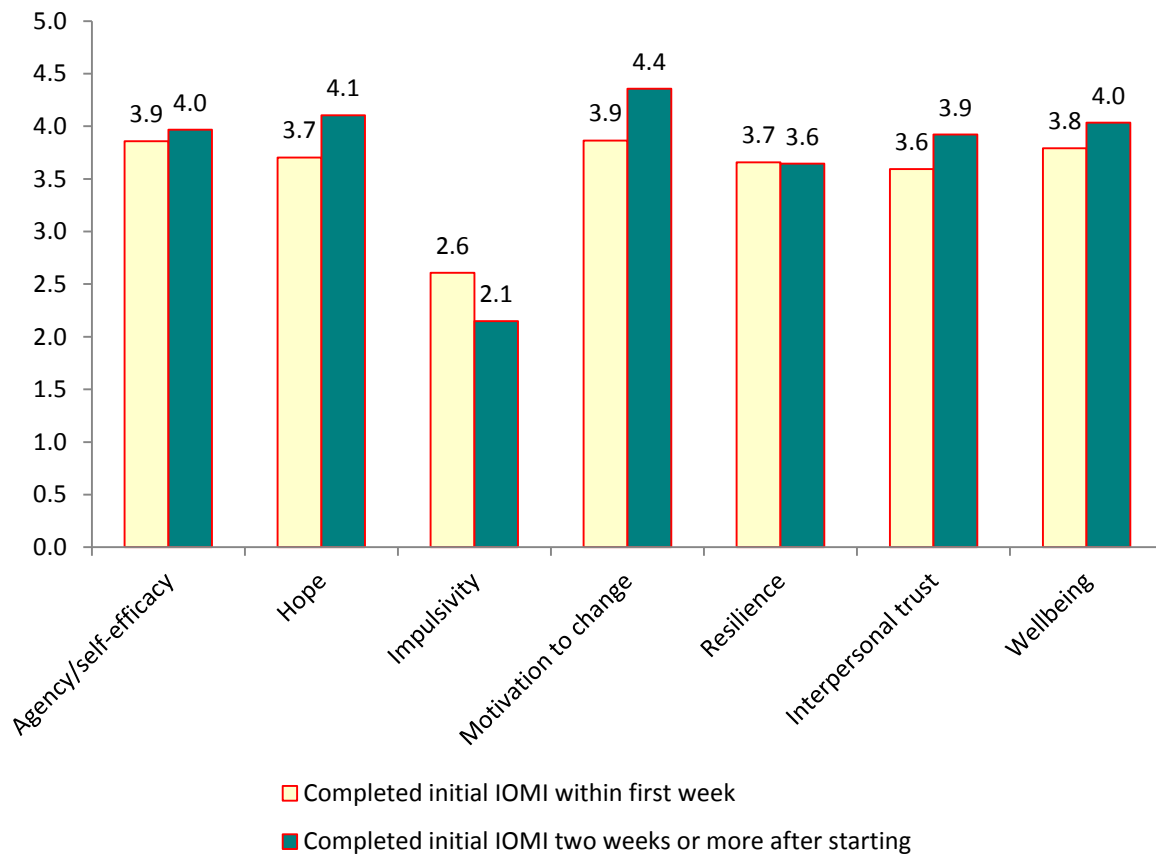
Overall, the initial IOMI scores for User Voice participants do not provide an obvious baseline measure in the same way that they have done in other research, because by the time that some participants will have completed them, they would already have experienced some impact from their User Voice involvement. In other words, as the period of time between starting with User Voice and completing the initial IOMI increases, the dimension scores will arguably have been affected by a ‘treatment effect’.

It is partly for this reason that a final effort was made in the last quarter of 2015 to generate larger numbers of initial IOMIs, which were completed as soon as possible after each respondent’s start date with User Voice (see ‘limitations’ section in Chapter 2).

Final analysis of initial IOMI scores by completion time does suggest a relationship of the sort referred to in the comment about ‘treatment effect’, below. We can see in **Figure 5** a marked difference between dimension scores for those participants who completed their initial IOMIs within one week of becoming involved (at which point we would expect the impact of User Voice to be minimal), and dimension scores for those who completed their initial IOMIs after being involved with User Voice for two weeks or more (n=152).

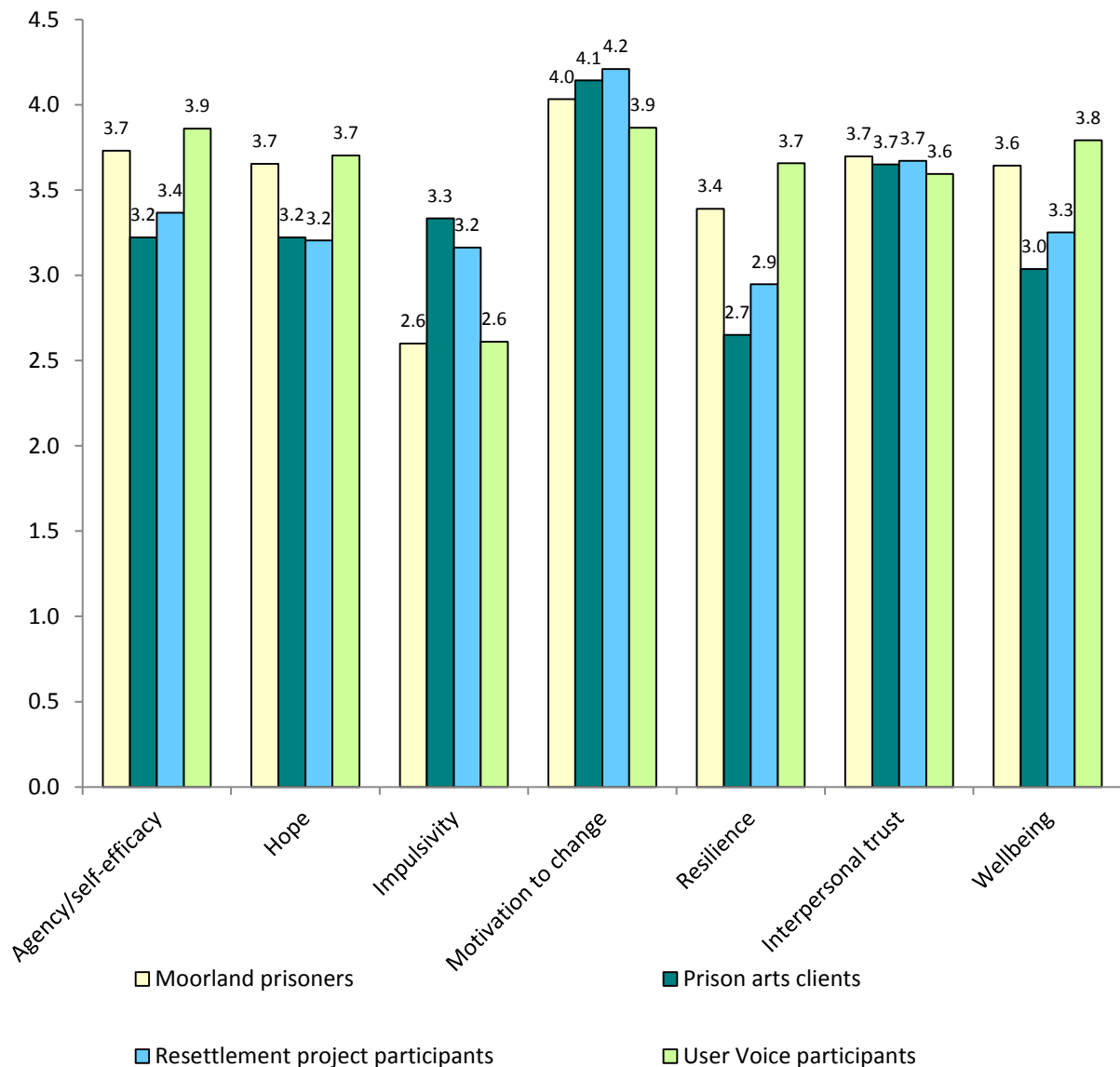
The first set of scores (n=32) is more positive than the second, across all dimensions.

Figure 5: A comparison of average dimension scores from initial IOMIs completed within one week of starting with User Voice, and scores from initial IOMIs completed two weeks or more after starting with User Voice



That first set of initial scores also allows for a clearer comparison with other groups – as can be seen from **Figure 6**. User Voice participants appear to have initial IOMI scores that are more similar to those for other offender groups, when scores from early completion are used instead of the full set of aggregated initial IOMIs. Using those average scores, the User Voice group appears to be very similar to IOMI respondents at Moorland Prison, for example.

Figure 6: A comparison of initial IOMI scores for User Voice participants (using only initial IOMIs completed within one week of joining User Voice), with initial scores for other offender groups

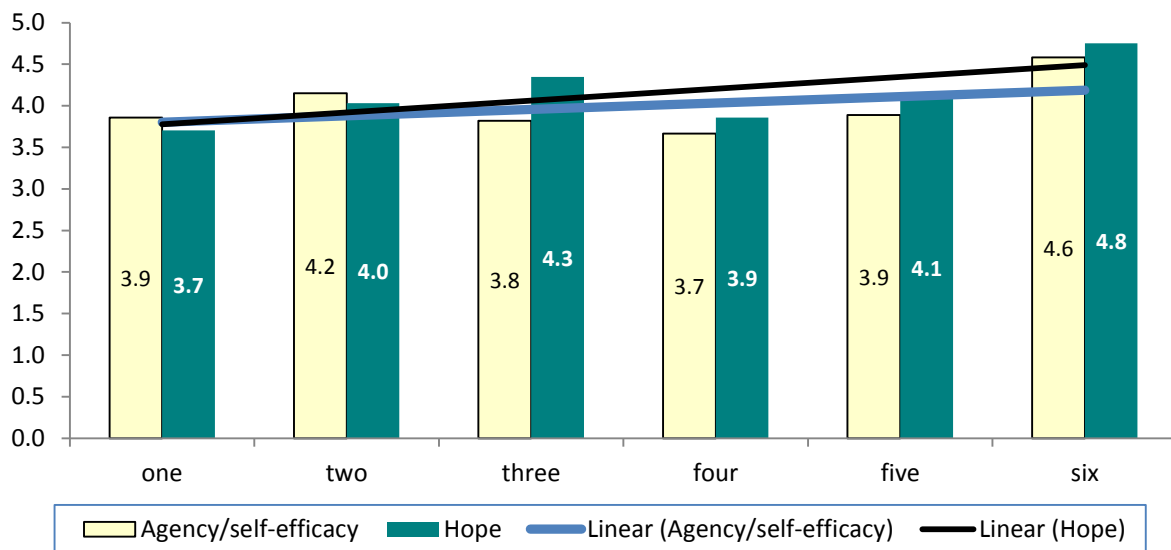


The extra initial IOMIs collected during the final quarter of 2015 make it even clearer that dimension scores are more positive the further away they are from the respondent's start date with User Voice. However, it is also worth highlighting a particular difficulty that there is with the notion of a project 'start date' in relation to User Voice. For many programmes – such as training programmes in particular, for example – the project start date is very clear and unambiguous. A programme of cognitive behaviour sessions for example, can be said to start on a specific date, and those participants who join the programme at that point will have that same start date. With User Voice however, there may be weeks of preliminary survey activity conducted by User Voice teams, and discussions involving prospective Council participants and other prisoners and/or User Voice staff sometimes long before the participant actually attends his or her first Council meeting. Preliminary liaison and consultation may, therefore, already have had some impact on a prospective Council member long before the date when they attend their first Council meeting. Nonetheless, the pattern referred to above can still be highlighted when we look at IOMI scores that are

recorded as close as possible to a participant's 'start date' as recorded either in the User Voice spreadsheets, or reported on the main questionnaires that we used as part of the evaluation.

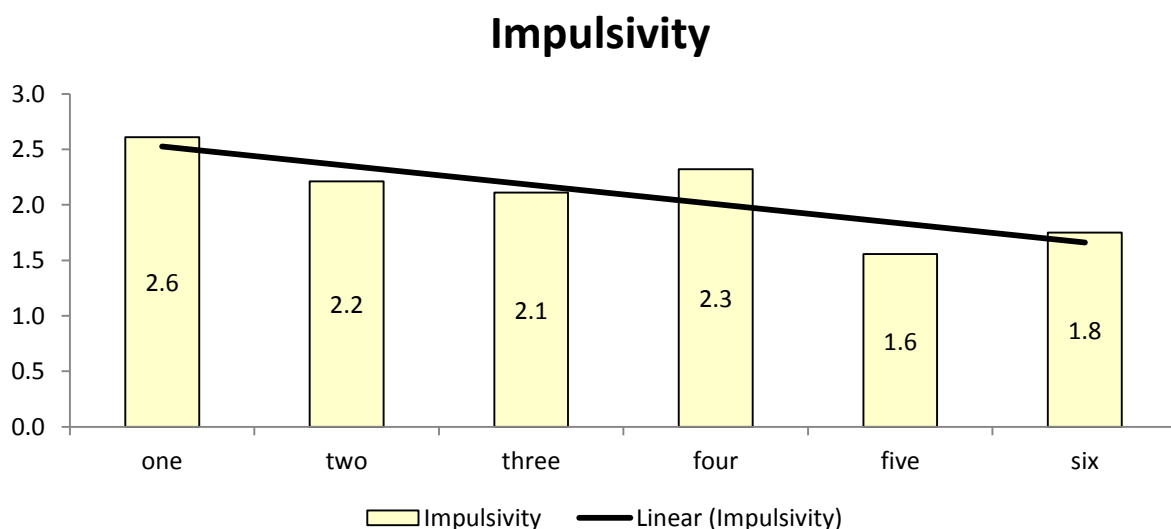
The following presentations show that for each of the main dimensions measured by IOMI, the readings become more positive as completions move away from the respondent's start date. We have used trend-lines to illustrate the pattern we refer to above.

Figure 7: A comparison of initial IOMI scores for agency/self-efficacy and hope, by number of weeks between project start date and completion of initial IOMI by User Voice participants



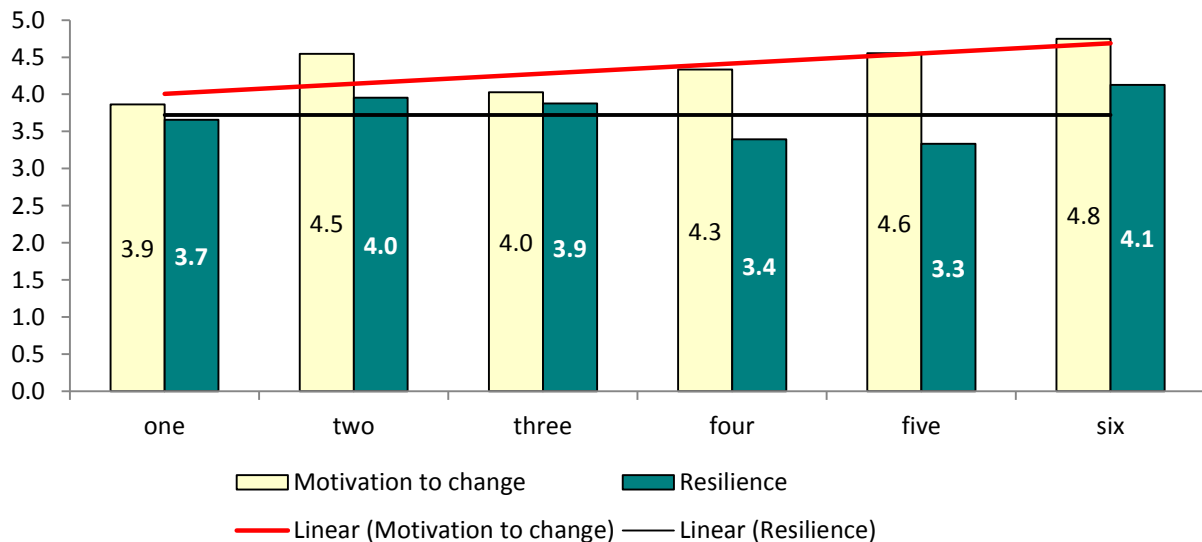
In the following figure, the trend line illustrates a positive trend (i.e. downward, in this case) away from project start date.

Figure 8: A comparison of initial IOMI scores for impulsivity, by number of weeks between project start date and completion of initial IOMI by User Voice participants



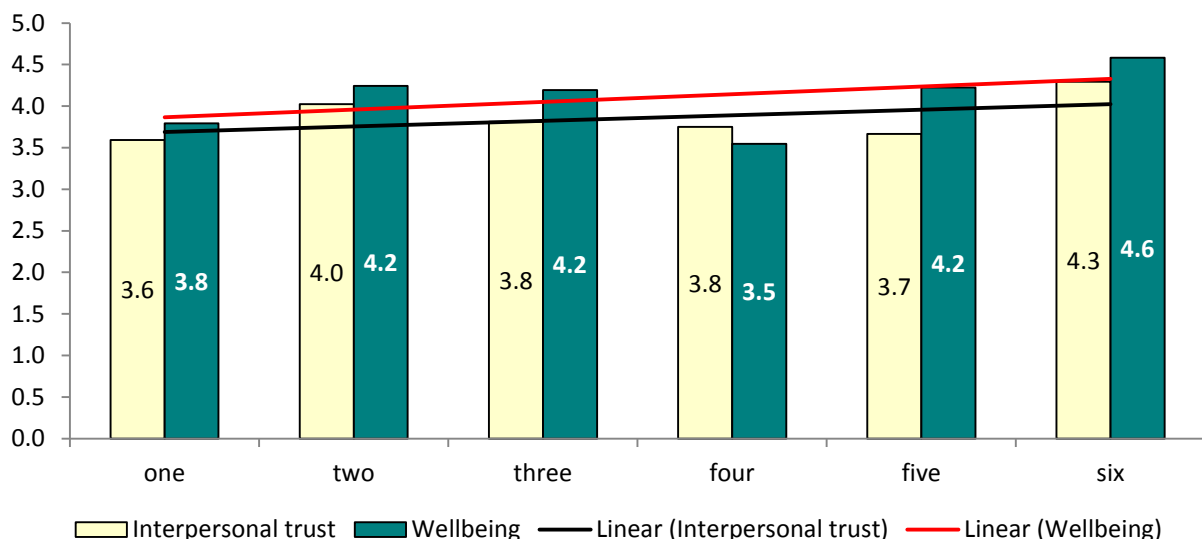
The trend lines in the following Figure show a positive upward shift for motivation to change, and a more or less static trend line for resilience.

Figure 9: A comparison of initial IOMI scores for motivation to change and resilience, by number of weeks between project start date and completion of initial IOMI by User Voice participants



Again, the trend lines for interpersonal trust and for wellbeing show a positive upward trend.

Figure 10: A comparison of initial IOMI scores for interpersonal trust and wellbeing, by number of weeks between project start date and completion of initial IOMI by User Voice participants



In terms of illustrating change over time for individuals, the ideal sets of IOMI readings are ones where participants complete initial questionnaires very close to the point where they begin their participation with the project, and where they also complete several follow-ups

after that point, which together allow for the plotting of individual trajectories which can in turn help evaluators to understand User Voice impact.

The final IOMI dataset for User Voice unfortunately still has key gaps in it which made it more difficult to illustrate User Voice impact on participants in terms of IOMI dimensions, for reasons already stated above concerning a lack of baselines and a lack of follow-ups.¹⁹

Although the analysis does in our view indicate that User Voice participation has had a positive impact on key dimensions of personal/emotional wellbeing (an impact which is also highlighted clearly in the qualitative data), the team was unable to specify these impacts more precisely despite further analysis toward the end of the research period.

It is also worth noting that arrangements are now in place at User Voice which should allow increasingly for the more routine and consistent administration of IOMI to participants, and data from any continued administration can also be housed in the new relational database. More detailed analysis would certainly be possible as better quality and more consistent IOMI data are generated, and the existing dataset would provide a powerful supplement to that.

4.4 IMPACT ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Nearly all interviewees and questionnaire respondents believed that Council engagement assisted them in improving both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills. Many of these were intertwined with personal development, as noted in the previous section. Some of the soft skills identified as being grown or strengthened through the Council were interpersonal and social skills (‘I feel like I can talk to anyone now’), as well as verbal communication skills and increased confidence in public speaking. Some hard (or more tangible) skills were also identified as being improved through Council participation. These included technological skills (like operating a computer and more advanced software usage) and writing skills.

Questionnaire respondents from both the Community and Prison Councils self-rated their skill levels very high (mean scores on a scale of 1-10). For prisoners, ‘reading and writing’ scored the highest at 8.65, followed by ‘working with others’ at 8.62. Even the lowest rated skills – ‘public speaking’ at 7.54 and ‘managing stress’ at 8.00 – were still rated high. For those in the community, ‘working with others’ scored the highest at 9.63, followed by ‘communicating’ at 9.37. Their lowest rated skills were ‘leadership’ and ‘negotiation’, both at 8.75. There are a few possible explanations as to why survey respondents self-rated their skill levels so high. It could be that there was some social desirability bias, in that participants wanted to portray themselves more positively and thus rated their skill levels higher than they might really be in practice. It could also be that individuals who are attracted to the Council do indeed have a higher-level skillset than we might typically find in the general prison population, for example (particularly for reading and writing).

¹⁹ For example, only three respondents who completed their initial IOMI within one week of starting with UV also completed a follow-up IOMI – and none of these respondents completed any IOMIs beyond the first follow-up.

There were no significant differences between these participants' self-rated skill levels when comparing their initial ratings to the follow-up ratings. This finding, however, does not mean that skills were not strengthened, grown, or developed, as noted above. From the follow-up questionnaire, when asked, 'what have you got out of participating in the User Voice Council', *all* survey respondents indicated that they had developed at least one skill. The most common skill gained from participation in both the prison and community Council was 'better communication skills' (for example, confidence in public speaking, improved writing skills, etc). This was reiterated by interviewees who discussed feeling more confident in their writing and presentation skills.

Community interviewees and those from the community focus groups commonly identified 'feeling supported' as a necessary foundation for building skills and personal development. Many felt that User Voice as an organisation provided 'a safe space' free of judgment. This helped to foster a sense of hope and possibility within them, thus enabling positive development. One respondent described the perceived support gained from being part of the Council: 'I made friends who are like a family to me. They helped me move on in life.' Another Council member talked about feeling 'embarrassed' by his lack of technological knowledge, but how his User Voice peers helped him without shaming him:

I didn't even know how to open a Word document! It is embarrassing and makes you feel stupid ... But they [other User Voice service users] didn't care. They just walked me through it and showed me how to do the basics ... There was no judgment. They took the piss a bit, but it was nice ... We help each other. It's [User Voice as an organisation] really good for that ... Support from people who know what you've gone through. (Community Council interviewee, Area B)

For prisoners, skills development came from sustained Council involvement, and therefore were more frequently mentioned by participants engaged in a Council that was well established. These skills included greater comfort with public speaking, open-mindedness towards others, and generally strengthened communication skills (in writing, speaking, and diplomacy). Prison Council members took great pride in showing off some of the materials they had prepared for elections or noticeboards, as well as their written proposals, many of which were of a professional standard. Much like the Community Council member quoted above, several prison participants had limited working knowledge of computers. From their Council participation, they had gained valuable technological skills not afforded to many prisoners. One member was proud to display spread sheets he had created, which documented kit change patterns in the prison. He said:

I've been inside [prison] for most of my life. Computers have always scared me ... I didn't know how to turn the damn thing on the first time I used it, but now I can do all this ... I now have officers coming to me to help with their reports. (Prison Council interviewee, Area A)

These kinds of 'transferable skills' were highly valued and made many participants feel as though their chances for employment had been strengthened. A User Voice staff member also highlighted the benefits associated with Council participation, and how it serves as a kind of 'gateway' for further development and opportunities:

It's developing their skills and we've seen quite a lot that have gone on to further education and quite a lot have gone into jobs that would otherwise not. We've seen [them] setting up a community interest company to deliver good services ...because there was a gap. So they see it as developing their skills and giving something back and doing something for others (User Voice Staff, Area C).

4.5 IMPACT ON ACCESS TO POSITIVE ROLE MODELS AND POSITIVE NETWORKS

One of the most distinctive aspects of the User Voice model is the role of ex-offenders in service delivery, Council development and facilitation, and as role models to Council members. Many Council members viewed User Voice employees as 'motivational' and 'inspirational' because of their post-release successes. Prisoners discussed how they rarely got the chance to positively interact with those who had served time and were now 'living a good life' on the outside. This gave many hope that they too could establish a 'good life' upon release:

You never hear about the positive stories – the stories of people who have done stretches and can then settle down and live right ... [the User Voice staff member] did his time and now he's working, earning ... He has nice stuff ... and he's happy ... You never see that in here. [Prison] staff never see it either. They think we're all gonna fail ... It's important for us. It gives us hope. If he can do it, maybe we can too (Prison Council interviewee, Area A).

The 'wounded healer' role of ex-offenders held significant symbolic and practical value for Council participants. This, to some extent, was voiced by prisoners more so than Community Council members. For Prison Council participants, engaging with ex-offenders in the prison environment was powerful. Many talked about this as a motivator for joining the Council ('they've been where I've been; they get it') and viewing the initiative as 'more legit' than other prison programming:

I engaged because [the User Voice staff member] knows what this is about. He's done time and knows how prisons work ... It wouldn't be the same if someone else came in and tried to tell us about change or prison life ... He knows our frustrations – he's been there and has felt it himself ... After I heard that he'd done a bird I approached him to find out more ... I don't think I would have been interested if he wasn't a con (Prison Council interviewee, Area B).

The best people to deal with cons are cons. The best people to decide how prison is gonna work is people that have been through the system... And that's the power of User Voice (Focus Group member, Area C).

There were also practical aspects of this relationship that prisoners found supportive. Many Prison Council members sought out User Voice staff to ask for guidance on upcoming parole hearings and sentence planning, how to better engage with Offender Management, and also for clarification on prisoner rights. Several questionnaire respondents also echoed this:

‘User Voice staff are always helpful’; ‘they’re knowledgeable and happy to help’; ‘I get more assistance from User Voice staff than prison staff’.

Community Council participants had a slightly different orientation toward User Voice staff and their ex-offender status. Although they voiced many of the same praises that prisoners did (especially around helpfulness), they focused more on the general peer support they gained from working with other ex-offenders. Part of this was linked to stigma and shame, and finding a ‘safe space’ within the User Voice organisation, as discussed earlier. Many talked about ‘being comfortable’ around other service users because they didn’t have to ‘hide’ their history. This shared status fostered a sense of ‘freedom’ and ‘peace’ amongst Council members:

I don’t have to hide who I am here – they know me and my background. And that’s okay ... I don’t judge them and they don’t judge me ... We can talk about our experiences openly ... I get a lot of support from them. I can be real with them.
(Community Council interviewee, Area A)

The majority of interviewees also talked about finding inspiration from the work of User Voice and its staff, and expressed a desire to assume an advocacy role themselves. All of the Community Council interviewees were initially motivated to join the council in order to ‘help and support service users’, and have a platform in which they could have a voice. Similar to questionnaire respondents, nearly all interviewees indicated that their status as ‘ex-offenders’ (or as service users) allowed them a greater level of empathy towards others in the system. Being advocates for, and role models to, other ex-offenders was identified as a primary motivator to engaging in the Council:

I try to motivate them [other service users]. Me personally, I try to motivate them to say, look I’ve been there, you’ve gotta just hang on man, you’ve gotta try to be strong and try to hang in there because I was there man, I’ve done it man, my record says that, it says that it’s all there and I’m here. Sometimes I can’t believe I’m here to even do this interview because I was really, really bad. Really bad. (Community Council interviewee, Area B)

4.6 IMPACT ON ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Although there is no universally agreed definition of active citizenship, there are some consistent assumptions which underpin the concept. Active citizenship generally refers to people getting involved in their local communities and democratic processes at all levels. It also involves roles and responsibilities. Crick (2002: 2) argues that it represents a focus on ‘the rights to be exercised as well as agreed responsibilities’. Activity in this sense is often associated with engagement in public services, volunteering, and democratic participation (see for example Crick 2000; Lister 2003).

Becoming ‘active citizens’ played an important role to Council members in a variety of ways. No interviewee used this terminology, but the descriptions of their Council experiences tap into the fundamental characteristics of being a ‘good citizen’: helping others, bettering their

environment or community, improving the quality of life for those around them, having a voice and choice, and mobilising others to contribute to the effort.

Uggen, Manza and Behrens (2004), for example, contend that in addition to employment and family, the significance of ‘civic reintegration’ in role and identity transformation is just as important. One aspect of active citizenship that is particularly relevant to ex-offenders is the ability to reshape one’s identity through action, improvement, and advocacy. This is what Maruna (2001: 87) refers to as ‘making good’. Making good is the process of feeling empowered, exercising personal agency, and rewriting one’s ‘shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life’. One respondent described this process as feeling ‘proud’ of the work he was doing and how User Voice opportunities allowed him to move past the ex-offender stigma.

All of the Council respondents stated that they felt a sense of satisfaction in helping others ‘negotiate the system’, ‘lending an ear’, or feeling as though they were accomplishing something constructive for future service users. Maruna’s (2001) work highlights the importance of generative activity for desisting offenders, as it aids them in finding new and productive roles. He argues that ‘other-centered pursuits provide socially excluded offenders with a feeling of connection to or ‘embeddedness’ in the world around them’ (ibid: 119). Council participation fostered a sense of connectedness and inclusivity for members, thus enabling them to feel like a productive citizen within their respective communities:

This is our community [the prison]. We live and work here ... It’s not a nice place to be, but some of us are here for a while ... We just want to make it the best we can, not just for us, but for those to come ... With the Council, right, we come together. We’re made to feel like someone’s listening and that we can be part of it; part of making it a better place. (Prison Council interviewee, Area A)

One Community Council interviewee discussed how engaging in the Council was going to aid him in fulfilling his desire to be an advocate for prisoners and to be a community leader. Council participation made him ‘feel good’ about providing solutions, while also building skills. He was motivated to become a more active part of his community and mobilise others in the effort: ‘I see what can be accomplished when you work together ... I want to make my community a better place, and feel like, now, I understand how to do that.’

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, a generative tone ran through most participants’ accounts of their Council experiences. ‘Helping others helps everyone’ was the strongest and most consistent theme to emerge from the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. This was viewed as a personally gratifying aspect of Council participation, as well as an opportunity to find (or create) purpose, ‘leave a legacy’, and work towards a more positive future. For many prison participants, they believed that they had a ‘duty’ to help others with the knowledge and know-how they had gained from the Council, and from their insight into how the prison administration operated (‘User Voice has helped me throughout my prison sentence by giving me a purpose’). As one interviewee remarked:

I've learned a lot from being on the Council; about the structure and the running of the regime of the prison. I know that I can help other people now because I have the knowledge gained from that to point them and signpost them in the right direction if they have any issues with certain things. People come up to me and ask me all the time about certain things, so I try – I feel as though I'm in more of a position personally to be able to do that, to actually help people. (Prison Council interviewee, Area B)

Helping others was also linked to stability, civility, and assisting others in finding constructive outlets for their frustrations. As one participant responded when asked why he remained involved in the Prison Council and what he got out of participation:

There was a lot of hiccups here, there was a lot of problems and people were always moaning and trying to kick off on the wings. You're always gonna get teething problems, so obviously we thought, this Prison Council ... you sit before the Governor and he will listen to you and he will want to make a change. So I thought, yeah, I would like to help other prisoners, so this is why I engage because, you know, I like to see other people – fair enough, I've been in a long time, people might be coming in for 6 months, a year but I think about the future, what other people could benefit from. It's like a legacy you leave behind for other people to say, oh yeah, the Prison Council did this. (Prison Council interviewee, Area A)

A number of participants linked Council participation to an interest in mentoring and advocacy beyond the scope of the prison, and expressed a desire to continue this kind of work post-release:

I've got family and I've got support. I believe in this sort of thing because there's not much out there for ex-offenders or users, service users. So for something like this to come about, it's good because it keeps the lads from coming back to jail, it helps them to rebuild their life and start to be a good member of society and put back into it what they took out and stuff like that. I believe in that sort of thing. (Community Council interviewee, Area C)

The only female interviewee was especially keen to be an advocate for women in prison and as they transition into the community. She had recently been released from prison after serving several months. She explained how eye opening the experience was, and that if it could happen to her, it could happen to anyone. She was keen to use her experience to 'give back' to others 'caught in the system':

I feel a duty now to provide a voice for those in the system, especially women ... I'd never been in prison before. I'd never had any contact with the law, and I think, well, if it could happen to me it could happen to anyone. And I think that's an important thing. We're not all bad people, sometimes we just make mistakes ... I want to use my experience to help others get past that – to move on, especially once they're out [of prison] ... I think for women it's really difficult – when you have that stigma and you don't want your kids to see you as a bad person ... I want them to see me as a

role model and someone who is trying to do good in the community ... I really want to do that for other women too. (Community Council interviewee, Area A)

4.7 INVOLVEMENT AND DESISTANCE

Throughout this chapter, connections have been made between User Voice Council participation and the process of desistance. Generative practice – giving back, helping others, and finding purpose – has featured most prominently, as Council members described the ways in which involvement has helped to develop skills, provide meaning in their lives, and give them hope for the future.

Recent scholarship on desistance has emphasised the importance of recognition, support, and empowerment in assisting offenders move away from crime. Barry's (2016: 94) study on young offenders, for example, suggests that 'the desistance process requires proactive engagement, not just from those engaged in offending to seek opportunities to change, but also from policymakers and the wider society to ensure these opportunities are available to all and not just to a few'. User Voice's Council model promotes these objectives by facilitating the co-production of more accessible, fair, and legitimate services within the criminal justice system. As much of this chapter has detailed, Council participants are made to feel 'valued', 'recognised', and 'listened to' within a system that often silences their voices. Nearly all respondents explained that 'feeling involved' in improvement efforts provided them with a sense of satisfaction and self-worth. Participation also engendered in them a hope that their future prospects were more optimistic from the [inter]personal and tangible skills gained from participation:

I feel hopeful that I can use what I've gained from the [Prison] Council to help me on the outside ... I have more confidence now. I can look people in the eye, I feel confident in myself and my skills ... Job interviews don't scare me so much anymore - I had to speak in front of 100 prison officers! Nothing's scarier than that. (Prison Council interviewee, Area C)

For Community Council participants, the ways in which they described the non-judgmental and inclusive support received from other User Voice service users suggests that this was an important part of their desistance process, echoing Weaver's (2015) findings on the centrality of social relations and, as part of that, mutual and peer support in the critical process of sustaining change. Maruna's (2001) research indicates that maintenance of crime-free behaviour, despite obstacles and frustrations, is necessary for individuals to successfully move away from reoffending, and many interviewees emphasised the value of having a network of other people who had been through the system, and with whom they could share frustrations, anxieties or fears. A few respondents likened User Voice to a 'family', and one Community Council member felt as though s/he was offered 'unconditional support' from the organisation and those within it. However, it was acknowledged by many that desistance required the individual to take control of the process, as one focus group member commented:

I think what I liked about User Voice was the strapline it uses - only offenders can stop reoffending – i.e. take responsibility for your own actions. At the end of the day, there's

lots of influences but if you really do want to stop offending, reoffending, then only you can do that. And User Voice can help you achieve that... I really liked what they wanted to do was help you, not do it for you but actually help you to help yourself and I really liked that ethos (Focus group member, Area B).

4.8 SUMMARY

This section has examined the views and experiences of Council participants in the relevant prisons and CRC areas, specifically as they relate to User Voice's Theory of Change model and its intended outcomes. One of the most significant and meaningful themes to emerge from the views and experiences of Council members was their shared sense of satisfaction from helping others. There was an underlying tone of generativity, as participants talked about 'giving back' by leaving behind a positive legacy in the form of a 'more humane system'. Overall, participants in both the community and prison settings felt that council engagement had a positive impact on their personal development, grew or strengthened soft and hard skills, and provided a 'safe space' in which peer support could flourish. Although motivations for initially joining and sustaining engagement in the Council varied, there were several consistent themes expressed across the sample of those surveyed and interviewed. These included the hope that Councils would help to improve conditions for those living and working within the prison and streamline the CRC system with the service user in mind. All participants indicated that they had gained at least one skill from Council participation, and many discussed ways in which their personal development had been enhanced from engaging with User Voice. Communication skills, confidence, increased self-worth (feeling 'valued'), and finding purpose and meaning in their lives through helping others were the most common skills or values gained from Council engagement. Community participants found value in sharing their experiences with others and acting as 'advocates' for those under supervision. All interviewees felt that having their voice heard was invaluable, and at the heart of Council participation and effecting change.

4.9 COSTS AND BENEFITS

In this section we comment on issues concerning costs and benefits at the level of individual User Voice participants.

4.9.1 *The costs of User Voice delivery*

As part of our focus on costs and benefits it was important to examine details about the costs associated with the design and delivery of User Voice projects, and we therefore accessed and analysed User Voice information concerning:

- throughputs of participants, by type of project, over time, and
- the costs of User Voice projects at each of the 6 prison and 3 CRC sites over the last few years.

Our initial intention was to use the above information to calculate a 'unit cost' for User Voice participants, but such an exercise was made more difficult by a number of issues including:

- the way in which ‘participant’ is defined (as opposed to ‘beneficiary’, which is wider but also less specific);
- the forms and duration of involvement for ‘participants’ as recorded within User Voice’s own systems for data collection.

We therefore focused on actual delivery costs (annually and per month) in our own analysis, although we have not made specific reference to those figures in this report. We calculated the average monthly cost for prison projects and for community based projects, and used those figures to assess ‘cost-effectiveness thresholds’, which we have referred to in some of the following sections.

We were not able to gather precise details about what the implementation of User Voice actually meant in terms of hours counts for various grades of prison or CRC staff, although it was clear from both the stakeholder and participant feedback that User Voice effectiveness did require some commitment of prison and probation staff time.

4.9.2 Identifying User Voice costs and benefits – feedback from prison and CRC stakeholders

As noted in Chapter 1, in order to gain more understanding of what key stakeholders felt the key issues were in relation to User Voice costs and benefits, we contacted key representatives at each User Voice site to set up telephone discussions to cover a range of relevant questions. We were interested in gathering feedback first of all from senior prison and CRC representatives concerning areas of change which they regarded as being most important.

Those discussions were supplemented by further discussions with staff members having more specific knowledge about the changes and measures referred to. For example, a prison Governor might suggest that reductions in violence are a top priority. In order to examine the cost-benefit dimensions of changes in those areas, the research team would then need to know more about precisely what is required in resource terms to deal with such incidents. Those further communications were designed to provide us with the kinds of details that we needed to generate unit costs for those kinds of incidents.

A total of eight such discussions were held by telephone, although a larger number of brief email communications with key staff were also undertaken during the period from September 2015 to the time of writing up in 2016. The team also made some follow-up calls during the writing up stage, to check a few details with key representatives. These discussions were not transcribed.

The responses were very useful, in that respondents were often able to provide details about staff resources required to address particular negative incidents – such as how many minutes it took them to complete a particular form for an adjudication for example - but were less aware of what the actual value might be of changes in levels of occurrence. One Governor noted for example, that although they were very good at monitoring, they “normally leave the costing analysis to HQ”.

In terms of how they would prioritise ‘positive change’, most senior staff referred to changes that are associated with re-deployable staff resources. More specifically, senior prison staff respondents tended to focus on reductions in negative incidents such as violence or serious rule infractions for example, because these kinds of incidents are for them resource-intensive to deal with, whereas CRC staff tended to focus on positive rehabilitative or resettlement outcomes, but also changes relating to more effective offender management. Again however, respondents were usually unaware of the cost-benefit dimensions relating to the kinds of changes that they prioritised as being positive or important²⁰.

4.9.3 Accessing official data on individual participants

In order to describe individual trajectories for individual User Voice participants and use these to estimate wider costs and benefits, the team approached key data providers, using contact details provided by User Voice. Although the team did not plan initially to gather individual-based data from official data providers, we decided that such information could be useful in allowing us to develop cost-able ‘stories of change’ with some accuracy, and that the information would allow us to use a costed case study approach (see Liddle, 2016) alongside other economic research resources such as those provided in the New Economy toolkit²¹.

We requested a set of key variables each for prison and CRC data providers (13 for prisons, and 15 for CRCs), and this list of variables included demographic details in each case, along with key fields relating to sentence record - for CRC participants, sentence record fields included warnings/breaches, re-offending during the course of their order, and details concerning employment and training. For prison participants, sentence record details included information concerning regime level changes, segregation and adjudications.

Follow up discussions were held with representatives about how the team might access historical information about named User Voice participants, relating to each of these variables. However, the team was given a number of reasons concerning why data requests of this kind would be difficult (or impossible) for providers to respond to. Issues concerning data protection were often referred to by local providers who declined to provide data on named individuals, but there were also issues concerning resource constraints and ‘pressure of work’ (as information concerning these variables was not always kept in the same system

²⁰ Representatives also provided useful feedback concerning causality, and some of the general comments about this were very much in keeping with those referred to in earlier Chapters of this report. Both senior and operational staff sometimes argued that it would not be possible to attribute positive changes within their agency to work done by User Voice specifically, since there were many activities being delivered which could have contributed to such outcomes – such as ‘PIDS’ for example.

²¹ The New Economy toolkit has several components. There is a useful set of guidance notes – Supporting Public Service Transformation: Cost benefit analysis for local partnerships; HM Treasury, Public Service Transformation Network; New Economy, April 2014 – and a unit cost database, the most current version of which is Unit Cost Data Base v1.4; Supporting Public Service Transformation: Cost benefit analysis for local partnerships; HM Treasury, Public Service Transformation Network; New Economy, March 2015. The latter is in EXCEL format, as is the main tool itself – Greater Manchester Cost Benefit Analysis Tool, version 4.2, March 2015.

or even the same building), and data quality and reliability (with providers pointing out gaps in what they actually collected, for example).

Given this reluctance to provide individual-based data (and the reasons provided to us for this reluctance), it was decided to focus on information from the qualitative data, material collected by User Voice itself, and information from our own initial and follow-up questionnaires²².

4.9.4 Individual outcomes – costs and benefits

The information referred to in the above section does provide a useful basis for assessing costs and benefits in relation to individual User Voice participants, and we present some of that detail here, beginning with material that has been used to develop individual case studies.

4.9.4.1 User Voice case study ‘Frank’

Frank became a member of a User Voice Community Council in October 2014, after having been involved in the criminal justice system for many years. He had previous convictions for 40 offences, with many of these offences involving violence. Frank had also been struggling for many years with substance misuse (including alcohol, heroin and crack cocaine), and he had been involved previously in a wide range of detox sessions, residential rehabs and other programmes to address these difficulties. None of these activities had been successful in helping him to change direction in terms of his substance misuse, although he had managed to cease using substances just prior to becoming involved with User Voice. Frank had also struggled with emotional/mental health issues, which had been exacerbated by his use of substances.

Being involved with User Voice gave Frank a sense of ‘purpose’ as he put it, and after several months of involvement he secured a full time job – in spite of having regarded himself as ‘unemployable’, and in spite of never having held full time employment previously.

Frank credits his User Voice involvement not only with helping him to continue to stay away from substances that he had previously struggled with, but to become more stable and strong emotionally and in terms of his ‘self-esteem’. This has had a positive knock-on effect in terms of his relationships with his family, and also in terms of his wider social networks.

At the time of writing, Frank had continued his effective abstinence from drugs and alcohol, and had also not offended again. He also felt that while his previous offending had adversely affected or ‘upset’ a wide range of people, ‘the ripple effect has reversed’, and he now feels that he is having a positive impact on people around him.

²² We have however put data fields in place on the User Voice database for some of this information to be gathered, and have made some recommendations in the final chapter about how such information could be collected over the longer term.

Costs and benefits

In order to illustrate some of the costs and benefits associated with individual User Voice participants and their experience of involvement, the team was able to access a range of further details concerning this case study (including details relating to specific offences committed, for example), and we have assessed this material and used it to provide a number of presentations.

In relation to offending specifically, we have used the details provided to illustrate the full range of costs associated with that specific set of offences committed by ‘Frank’, prior to his involvement with User Voice.

The approach taken to generating these figures involves a number of key steps:

- a cost estimate for each specific listed offence is selected (with most of these coming from the New Economy toolkit referred to above);
- where available, these cost estimates are broken down into fiscal costs (i.e. those costs associated directly with key agencies and their direct expenditure), and wider economic and social costs (i.e. including insurance and property costs on the economic side, and on the social side, costs relating to the physical and emotional impacts on victims of crime, for example);
- in cases where a specific offence type does not have robust cost estimates available, it is either converted into a related category which does have such an estimate, or simply treated as a generic ‘other’ offence (which does have a cost estimate averaged across all crime types);
- once estimates are selected for each offence, those values (along with figures for the number of offences of each type committed) are plugged into a tool which calculates the figures on the following table;
- the tool calculates separate totals for each offence by ‘type’, and it also calculates the ‘total public value’ of each offence (i.e. the total fiscal, economic and social costs associated with it); and finally
- the tool calculates a final total using an ‘uplift’ figure (which is an estimate of the numbers of actual crimes committed in comparison to the number of crimes that a person is convicted for).²³

The results of that analysis are presented on the following table.

²³ It is well known that specific offence types vary widely in terms of how closely their actual occurrence matches official recorded crime figures. While very serious crimes such as homicide have little or no element of ‘hidden crime’, other offences such as shoplifting certainly do – that is, for offences in the latter category, a person will often commit a large number of offences that they are not convicted or even arrested for. So that particular offence has an uplift figure of 16.1. The uplift figures used by the team were produced by Greater Manchester Police, to inform the crime section of the New Economy toolkit.

Table 6: Offence costs relating to case study ‘Frank’, prior to involvement with User Voice

	recorded incidents	cost (fiscal) per incident	total fiscal	economic impact per incident	total economic impact	social impact per incident	total social impact	total public value	with uplift*
Burglary not in a dwelling	3	1,786	5,359	2,293	6,879	1,055	3,164	15,403	24,174
Common assault	9	509	4,581	357	3,211	1,096	9,866	17,658	121,403
Other wounding	4	3,093	12,371	1,548	6,192	6,332	25,329	43,893	37,423
Robbery	1	4,110	4,110	1,503	1,503	4,238	4,238	9,851	1,981
Shoplifting	1	29	29	109	109	(no estimate available)	(no estimate available)	138	1,950
Theft (not vehicle)	1	400	400	285	285	164	164	850	14,051
Theft from vehicle	1	67	67	717	717	370	370	1,154	275,199
Vehicle theft	2	265	530	4,160	8,320	1,112	2,224	11,074	24,174
Other crime	18	681	12,262	756	13,611	1,843	33,181	59,054	121,403
Total	40		39,709		40,828		78,537	159,074	476,180

*Given that offences that are not prosecuted do not incur the same level of fiscal costs as those that are, we have deducted a proportion of direct criminal justice costs from these totals. Uplifted totals should obviously still be regarded as indicative only, since we do not know how many offences the participant may have committed, for which he was not officially charged or prosecuted. As noted earlier, uplift multipliers are based on large aggregate datasets.

It is worth noting that the figures presented on the table relate to offences committed previously by only *one* User Voice participant, and although it should not be claimed that the sums involved are somehow immediately ‘cash-able’ if they are prevented or avoided – they are very significant nonetheless, and illustrate how substantial and multi-faceted the benefits can be just in relation to offending, to the extent that a programme or project is able to bring about reductions or a cessation individual offending.

In this case, the ‘before’ costs for offending also need to be considered against the fact that the official offending data for this participant show that there has been no further offending beyond their start date with User Voice.

There would of course also be very significant costs associated with sentences themselves, but in order to calculate these precisely we would have needed more specific details concerning them (such as when each sentence began and ended, and which offences that sentence related to). But clearly, to the extent that a project brings about a reduction or cessation in individual offending, it would also generate benefits in terms of avoided sentence costs.

In relation to non-offending outcomes, we have also used the information provided in relation to this case study to calculate an overall ‘cost-benefit trajectory’ for this User Voice participant.

The bespoke tool that we use to calculate individual trajectories on the basis of such information, operates on the general assumption that if a particular social problem or issue attracts public expenditure if not addressed effectively, and if such expenditure is either reduced or not required after a particular intervention to address it is successful, then it is legitimate to plot these expenses and savings on a timeline to calculate ‘net value’ and ‘break-even points’ in relation to such interventions.

Where issues such as substance misuse are not addressed effectively for example, there is a set of costs that arise for a range of agencies over time, and equally, where previous costs are no longer necessary because a particular project or programme has allowed a participant to address the issues successfully – those (mostly reactive) costs are no longer incurred, and a benefit can be calculated for ‘costs avoided’.

In relation to this case study, the available information suggests very clearly that there were significant previous difficulties in relation to substance misuse and mental/emotional wellbeing, and that User Voice involvement allowed the participant not only to address these difficulties successfully, but to go on to secure full time employment as well.

We have therefore costed those dimensions and entered relevant values into the tool referred to, and have made the following assumptions about specific costs:

- in relation to substance misuse, we have used estimates for the costs of untreated addiction (at £3,669 per annum for fiscal costs, £8,954 per annum for economic costs,

and £3,814 per annum for social costs), and have also used these values to assess benefits after cessation (i.e. costs avoided)²⁴;

- in relation to mental/emotional health, we have used estimates for the costs of dealing with mental health difficulties per annum (at £2,281, fiscal, and £4,590, economic – we have not included a social cost)²⁵;
- we have assumed that successfully addressing the above two issues did not occur all at once – although the evidence suggests that the issues were addressed very quickly, we have assumed incremental progress over a six month period, spanning the participant's User Voice start date equally;
- we have included an estimated User Voice unit cost for the period before the participant secured a full time job (this figure is based on an analysis of overall project costs and throughput figures, but is not reproduced here as it is commercially sensitive);
- we have assumed that the participant was in receipt of benefits of some sort prior to securing employment, and have used (unpublished) DWP figures for the overall annual savings that accrue when an individual on benefits secures full time employment (the estimate of £9,949 includes estimates for benefit savings, increases in tax revenues and a small amount for national health service cost savings)²⁶;
- we have not included offending on the timeline, because the substance misuse estimates include a component for substance-related offending, and it is important to avoid double-counting;
- we have not costed for any other areas about which we did not have information (e.g. accommodation or homelessness, prior and subsequent use of other services).

In relation to the following presentation in Figure 11, it can be seen that the participant's cost-benefit trajectory involves a 'break-even point' at around six months after the project start date. From that point on, cumulative benefits begin to outstrip cumulative costs starting from a few months prior to the start date (- the start date itself is midway between 'month -1', and 'month 1').

For the sake of anonymity, we have not made specific reference to some of the details that we have used to generate the presentation (e.g. precise offending time periods prior to involvement, and type of employment secured), but it is intended to be illustrative only, of impacts in individual cases which can be costed.

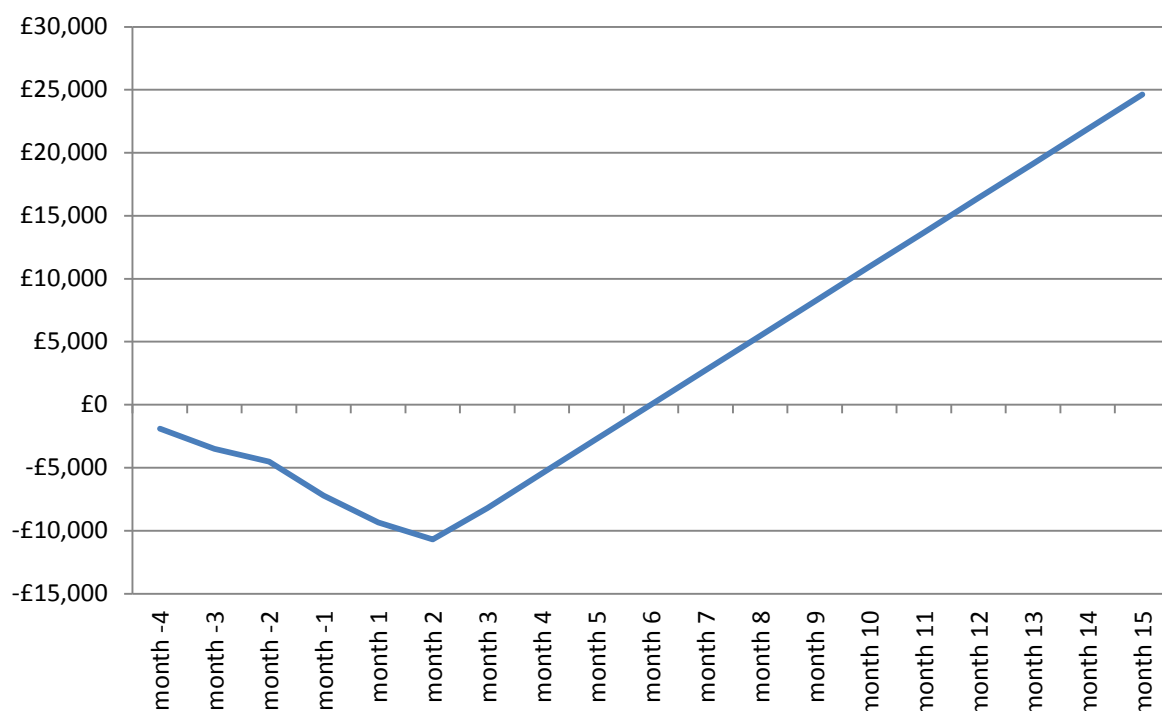
It is also worth noting that the presentation is based on actual information, and that the end point (month 15) takes us up to the time of writing this report. We obviously do not know how durable positive changes will be beyond this point, but as of the time of writing, the participant's success in managing the issues referred to has continued.

²⁴ See *Estimating the crime reduction benefits of drug treatment and recovery* (National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse, 2012), p.11. Figures have been uplifted for 2015, and include fiscal and social costs.

²⁵ See *Paying the Price: the cost of mental health care in England to 2026* (King's Fund, 2008), p.118, 25, 40, 59, 74, 96, 104-109 and 114. Figures have been uplifted for 2015, and include fiscal and economic costs.

²⁶ See *The Department for Work and Pensions Social Cost-Benefit Analysis framework* (Working Paper 86) / response to parliamentary questions (HC Deb 6 February 2013, vol 558, col 352W).

Figure 11: Cost-benefit trajectory for case study 'Frank'



Finally, it is again worth pointing out that the details presented are for only one User Voice participant. Clearly, User Voice would not need to generate positive impacts of this kind in very many participants in order quite easily to outstrip its own costs.

Reductions in offending were also clearly highlighted in some of the other qualitative data, although the team was not able to match such feedback with official offending data. One participant in a User Voice prison described how others who had been involved had subsequently reduced their offending, for example:

Well, we've just done – my pal what I met when I came here, he got out December and he's normally like a prolific offender, in and out and he's now working with like charities out there and that and he hasn't come back. So you can obviously see it's working and another couple of Council members since have gone out and they've seeked employment and they're doing really well and they haven't committed no more crimes (Prison Council interviewee, Area B).

I would say it's successful just on the fact there are 2 people what have gone out and they've got both employment through the Prison Council and they're PPOs and they've never been longer than 6 months out of prison and that's about 8 months already they've been out and they're working voluntarily all the way through it still (Prison Council interviewee, Area B).

This latter respondent makes references to positive outcomes in relation to employment, cessation of offending, and deregistration of individuals who were previously classified as PPOs (Prolific and Priority Offenders). To the extent that User Voice involvement may successfully lead to a deregistration impact of this kind, it is worth highlighting the cost-able benefit that this would involve. Details are provided in the following table of costs associated with monitoring a PPO, and the benefits that would therefore accrue where deregistration is an outcome.

Table 7: Intensive monitoring of PPO/high risk offenders - illustration of benefits for reductions in costs relating to User Voice participants²⁷

Number of offenders	Police ²⁸	drugs/alcohol worker ²⁹	probation/YOS ³⁰	Total cost per week	Total cost per month	Total cost for six months
1	£1,378	£264	£412	£2,054	£8,901	£53,404
2	£2,756	£528	£824	£4,108	£17,801	£106,808
3	£4,134	£792	£1,236	£6,162	£26,702	£160,212
4	£5,512	£1,056	£1,648	£8,216	£35,603	£213,616
5	£6,890	£1,320	£2,060	£10,270	£44,503	£267,020
6	£8,268	£1,584	£2,472	£12,324	£53,404	£320,424

In terms of outcomes relating to community-based Council activities specifically, although participants do not always provide much in the way of specific detail about their own offending levels or their own struggles with ‘resettlement’ or other practical issues, they often do make general reference to some of these areas. Feedback of that kind (and in relation to the case studies in particular) does suggest that User Voice has had positive impacts for participants across a range of key resettlement issues, and although it is difficult to estimate this impact precisely, User Voice would not need to have very much of an impact in order for the cost of their activities to represent value for money.

²⁷ All figures are based on cost estimates provided in Nadia Brookes, Barbara Barrett, Ann Netten and Emily Knapp, 2013; *Unit Costs in Criminal Justice*. Personal Social Services Research Unit, PSSRU Discussion Paper 2855; and Lesley Curtis, 2013: *Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2013*. Personal Social Services Research Unit, University of Kent. Figures have not been uplifted to 2015 levels, but the relevant uplift would be 1.5%.

²⁸ Total is calculated assuming that roughly three fifths of the police hours (6 hours at £79 per hour) are client-focused work and two fifths (4 hours at £226 per hour) face to face.

²⁹ Total is calculated using figures for a Specialist Support Worker, and assumed one hour of case-related work at £71 per hour and one hour of face to face work at £193 per hour.

³⁰ Total is calculated using YOT practitioner figures and assuming 2 hours case-related work at £45 per hour and 2 hours face to face work at £161 per hour.

The following table summarises annual benefits which can be realised when sustained impacts are achieved in a variety of areas including reductions in substance misuse, employment, and the successful addressing of mental health issues, etc.

Table 8: Indicative costs and benefits (per annum) for positive non-offending-related outcomes, by number of User Voice project participants

	Number of participants				
	1	2	3	4	5
Alcohol misuse - estimated annual cost to the NHS of alcohol dependency, per year per dependent drinker ³¹	3,693	7,386	11,079	14,771	18,464
Drugs misuse - average annual fiscal savings resulting from reductions in health and social care costs as a result of effective treatment ³²	16,437	32,874	98,622	65,748	82,185
Apprenticeship Level 3 Qualification - annual benefits to the exchequer ³³	3,709	7,418	22,255	14,837	18,546
Fiscal benefit from a workless JSA claimant entering work (per individual, per year) ³⁴	9,949	19,898	59,694	39,796	49,745
Not in Employment Education or Training - average cost per 18-24 year old not in education, employment or training ³⁵	14,827	29,653	88,960	59,306	74,133
Homelessness application - average one-off and on-going costs associated with statutory homelessness ³⁶	2,798	5,595	16,785	11,190	13,988
Average cost of service provision for people suffering from mental health disorders, per person per year (all ages, including children, adolescents and adults) - total fiscal cost ³⁷	6,872	13,743	41,230	27,487	34,358

³¹ See *Alcohol Use Disorders: diagnosis, assessment and management of harmful drinking and alcohol dependence* (NICE Clinical Practice Guidance 115), p.408. Figures have been uplifted for 2015, and include fiscal and social costs. This measure is 'amber-flagged' in the New Economy toolkit due to the lack of a full breakdown of constituent costs.

³² See footnote 24.

³³ This figure is simply an example of the level of benefit generated by a specific qualification – similar costs can be derived for a very wide range of qualifications. The actual calculations involved in producing these estimates are complex – see BIS (2011): *Returns to Intermediate and Low Level Vocational Qualifications* p9 to 10.

³⁴ See footnote 26.

³⁵ See *Youth Unemployment: the crisis we cannot afford* (ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment, 2012).

³⁶ See *Research briefing: Immediate costs to government of loss of home* (Shelter, 2012), p.7. Figures have been uplifted for 2015, and include fiscal and economic costs.

³⁷ See footnote 25.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPACT ON SERVICES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The User Voice Theory of Change highlights the ways in which User Voice activities would be expected to generate impacts not just on individual participants, but on how services themselves are designed and delivered. Within the model, it is noted that a broader and longer term set of outcomes relating to User Voice work would include increased effectiveness and increased cost-effectiveness – as services become more focused and efficient from being tailored to the views and needs of users themselves. We focus in this chapter on some of those outcomes, again drawing from the full range of data collected as part of the evaluation.

5.2 PERCEIVED OUTCOMES AND EFFECTS ON SERVICES

The perceived outcomes and effects of participation in and proposals progressed by the User Voice Councils are both practically and aspirationally multi-faceted. User Voice and Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) in both prison and community settings (where they exist) have a role to play in shaping the proposals advanced by Council members to ensure they are ‘realistic’. By this, it is suggested that proposals should not conflict with institutional or wider penal policy – nor inflame public sensibilities.

We have to make sure the proposals are in line with prison service orders or prison service instructions and with that would come the Grayling agenda...because otherwise you're setting the Council with a real sense of unrealistic expectations (Prison officer, Area A).

I think we go by the rule of is there any policy, is there any written policy that will affect this proposal? Will it pass the Daily Mail test? So will the general public object to what we're looking to propose?...Public opinion does affect policy whether we like it or not and that can be to the detriment of the lives of serving offenders (User Voice Staff, Area A).

On balance, the length of time from a proposal being accepted to progressing towards implementation and thus the achievement of outcomes generally depends on the nature of the proposed change and whether, for example, there are significant economic or human resource implications, and/or whether it involves actions by external agencies or can be done in-house.

You don't wait long. [Name of place], we've had to wait – a few proposals have been put forward and those that have saved them money seemed to be implemented. Those that was gonna cost them money weren't implemented as quick (User Voice staff, Area C).

Interviewees in the community all believed that the Council could make a difference to the way things were done in their respective CRCs, though simultaneously recognised that changing systems, practices, and attitudes towards offenders was challenging and would take time. One respondent acknowledged that each proposal or recommendation was a “stepping

stone” towards improvement, and that achieving “even one out of ten things would help”. Several participants explained that part of the Council process was having “faith” and an optimistic belief that things could change, even if they personally had not witnessed it. When asked if he thought that the Council could make a difference to the way things are done in CRCs, one Community Council interviewee responded:

With some perseverance and some continuous vibes, continuous, like pushing forward, change can happen. Otherwise I wouldn't be involved if I didn't think that. I have to have a little bit of faith. I have to believe that and I believe change has happened, you know what I mean, like the Council was able to show like small changes, do you know what I mean, like that's through User Voice that there have been changes prior to me coming to User Voice. So it's like that gives me a little bit of inspiration to say if something wants to change, then something else can change again. (Area B)

Although many community participants did not have as many tangible examples of having witnessed change to procedures or processes as the prison participants did, several who had been engaged for longer periods of time had seen improvements and found great satisfaction from being part of the effort.

I'm convinced that the Council can make a difference and I've seen it happen. I've been on the Council and I've been at meetings with the CRC ... and I've been involved with little measures and some larger measures that had made a difference ... when I first became involved, I was a little cynical... that perhaps this is just a way of probation involving people because it looks good. In actual fact, I was pleasantly surprised. I'd been on a number of working groups, communication, where we put forward ideas, put forward suggestions and I've seen them develop into actual events. For example, [on one proposal] I helped design the poster that went up in the probation offices and I went back to my office a little bit later and there's the poster. I could see my input into it....I think there's a real willingness to want to take notice of the service user opinion. (Area C)

Perceived outcomes of Council activities on services can be subsumed under operational outcomes, relational-cultural outcomes and relational-environmental outcomes, and these are explored more fully below.

5.2.1 Operational Outcomes

The following text box delineates a range of operational outcomes as a direct consequence of Council activity identified by all staff respondents. What all these different outcomes have in common is that they are oriented to engendering an improved quality of life or supporting engagement in services and, thus, by implication, contributing to improved service delivery, if not service outcomes.

An overview of operational outcomes identified by staff

Prisons:

The provision and distribution of delayed allocation of 'kit' or clothing;
 A telephone monitoring system and regular maintenance by BT resulting in more available working phones for prisoners and, as a consequence, a calmer environment;
 The introduction of new television channels;
 The introduction of a new system for the processing of applications, i.e. updated telephone numbers;
 Improvements to visits areas including the provision of hot food on visits;
 Provision of in-cell phones;
 Investment in astro turf for playing football; the acquisition of new gym equipment;
 Establishment of violence reduction representatives to enable more prisoners to enjoy the liberty of out-of-cell circulation at a given time;
 Savings on expenditure of food and the redirection of resources to improved catering facilities;
 Reduction in complaints about the standard of food as an outcome of Prison Council involvement in planning new menus in consultation with the wider prison population;
 Wearing own clothes on prison visits;
 Online purchasing of prisoner clothes/consumables.

CRCs:

Changes to the appearance and fabric of CRC waiting rooms and to the nature of the information available to service users;
 The co-production of information leaflets;
 The introduction of a fifteen minute buffer to accommodate delays in arrivals to unpaid work
 Reduced waiting times for service users;
 The establishment and recruitment of Engagement Workers;
 The employment of a paid Recovery Worker with prior convictions;
 Mental health representatives in one CRC;
 The development of a booklet on how to disclose convictions;
 Changes to the information provided in the induction process and to the nature of and format in which that information is provided;
 A review of the appointment card system.

5.2.2 Relational-Cultural Outcomes

The relational-cultural outcomes reported by many staff respondents suggested that the introduction of User Voice Councils had not only contributed to the reduction of some of the historical ‘barriers’ that existed between service users and professional staff but had also contributed to improved relationships and reinforced a need for a shift in cultures, towards a more participatory approach. Relatedly, some User Voice staff commented that they had observed a shift in the interpersonal dynamics and the development of mutually respectful relationships.

I think it’s broken down some of the barriers, some of the established older barriers...it’s helped to sort of... [help staff] understand that they have to change some of the ways they practice (CRC Staff, Area B).

[Staff are] more respectful for the service user that isn’t even on the Council and I see that just by analysing and watching (User Voice Staff, Area A).

5.2.3 Relational-Environmental Outcomes

By the same token, professional groups commented on the impact on not only interpersonal relationships but the prison or service user environment more broadly. For example, it was generally considered that where changes had been implemented, as an outcome of Council activity, which positively impacted on people’s quality of life or their experience of services, this perceived progress further contributed to improved relationships and reduced conflict. These improved relationships in turn had a ripple effect on the available time prisoner officers, for example, had to engage in proactive practice rather than reacting to issues that arose as a consequence of discontent and unrest: ‘If their life’s easier, our life’s easier’ (Prison Officer, Area B).

If we have a happier, safer, more decent environment for prisoners and they’re happy, then things will run smoother, staff will have – it’ll be safer for the staff. They will be able to do more of the job that we’re actually employed to do rather than deal with incidents, we’ll be able to be a better personal officer, get more involved with the prisoners and the regime will run smoother’ (Prison Officer, Area C).

It was suggested that the Councils had increased professionals’ understandings of and insights into service user and prisoner experiences. In so doing, some professionals recognised that by taking service users’ views seriously, that not only might relationships improve, but that professional practice as well as service provision could be enhanced.

If service users can see us as an organisation taking their point of view seriously, then the relationship between current service users and their offender managers can improve and actually – they do listen to us (CRC Staff, Area B).

I think the Councils have been influential in making us think about things from a service user perspective more than we have done (CRC Staff, Area B).

5.3 WIDER IMPACTS IN USER VOICE PRISONS/CRC AREAS

The User Voice Theory of Change suggests that more positive engagement with services by users would in turn be related to increased “effectiveness” of those services because of more positive relationships between users and staff (and therefore reduced tensions between users and staff), for example, and increased satisfaction of users with the service and with the scope that they have to influence its design and delivery. One would therefore also expect that User Voice activities would have a positive impact on key indicators such as number of adjudications, incidents of violence (e.g. assaults on staff), breach rates on supervision and numbers of user complaints.

The team therefore focused in some detail on key indicators of that kind, in order to identify changes which might provide evidence of a “User Voice effect” in relation to services. The team analysed official data for the period from September 2012 to December 2015, as well as the more specific time periods for individual projects, using their implementation dates.

5.3.1 *User Voice prisons*

In relation to Prison Councils, feedback from participants and stakeholders does suggest that there have been positive impacts on prison regimes, in terms of positive relationships and enhanced general quality of life. Although it is sometimes difficult to quantify, it is likely that these changes will have exerted a downward pressure on levels of negative incidents within the prison.

The team therefore examined data concerning a range of indicators, including changes in numbers of adjudications, prisoner complaints, assaults on staff, and prisoner on prisoner violence.

Comparisons were made both between each individual User Voice prison and a key “comparator” prison³⁸, and between User Voice and non-User Voice prisons more generally, in relation to each of the indicators referred to. A number of methods were used to test any measured differences for significance, including regression analysis and Chi-square analysis, depending on the approach used.

The team tried a variety of approaches to the analysis of the datasets referred to above, and two approaches in particular have provided findings that are presented in the following sections.

³⁸ Each prison in England and Wales has been matched with a small set of “comparator prisons” which have been selected by NOMS researchers to be similar to the prison of interest in terms of population size and category. Researchers use these comparator prisons to assess particular interventions or programmes that are launched in one prison but not in the comparator prison.

The first approach involved examining data concerning a relevant indicator for the whole period of User Voice operation, and comparing performance during that period with the performance of a comparator prison during the same period.

The second approach involved examining data for particular indicators using both “before and after” time periods alongside one another for each User Voice prison and comparator prison as a *pair*. The first step of this approach involved plotting incident numbers by month for each User Voice prison for the whole period of its operation in that prison, and comparing that with a per month plot for a similar time period before User Voice became involved. A similar comparison was then undertaken for that prison’s comparator prison, using the same time period. The final step involved comparing overall changes between before and after periods for the two prisons.

Further details relating to each of the performance indicators referred to above, are provided separately below. We also provide some further details about the two approaches in Appendix 1, along with some further presentations of results.

5.3.1.1 *Adjudications*

Adjudications take place when a prisoner is deemed to have broken one or more prison rules, and where that prisoner is formally charged with having done so. It is an offence to break prison rules, and the consequences for doing so range widely depending on the nature and seriousness of the infraction, but can include loss of privileges (such as having a TV), temporary cessation of earned funds, or extra days. The procedures to follow in order to “prove” an adjudication can be highly complex, but are also highly formalised and monitored.³⁹

When comparing changes in the numbers of adjudications in User Voice prisons over time and comparing these with changes in comparator prisons for the same time periods, rates were hugely varied across the six prisons under study. Although there was positive impact in some, there were also prisons where performance was worse than that in the relevant comparator prison. The table below summarises these variations across User Voice prisons, and categorises performance in the User Voice prison as being either “better” or “worse” than performance in the relevant comparator prison. “Better” can mean either that adjudications were being reduced in the User Voice prison at a higher rate than in the comparator prison, or that adjudications were increasing, but at a lower rate than in the comparator prison. This particular table refers to analysis of all adjudications data for time periods during which User Voice was operating in the relevant prison. All differences were tested for statistical significance using a regression analysis undertaken in SPSS.

³⁹ Further details concerning these procedures can be found in NOMS documents such as *PSI 47/2011 – Prison Discipline Procedures*.

Table 9: Changes in numbers of adjudications – a comparison of performance in User Voice and comparator prisons

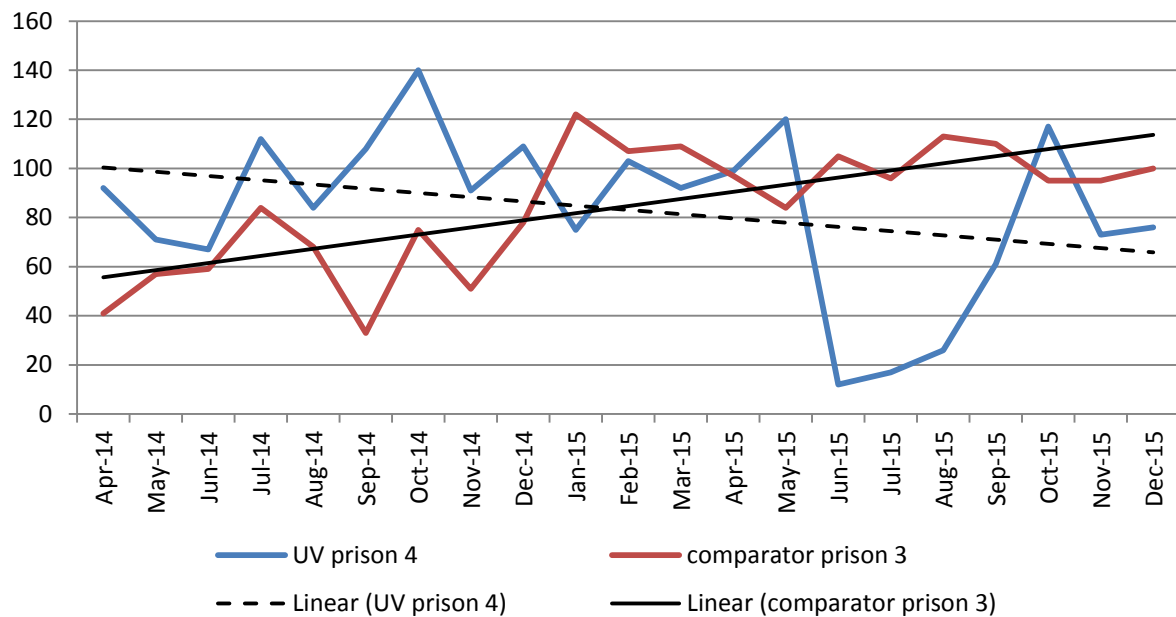
	Performance relative to comparator prison	Relative difference in improvement per month (no. of adjudications) ⁴⁰
User Voice prison 1	Better	0.10
User Voice prison 2	Better	2.15
User Voice prison 3	Worse	2.91*
User Voice prison 4	Better	4.63*
User Voice prison 5	Worse	1.41
User Voice prison 6	Worse	5.20*

*= significant at $p < 0.05$

In order to understand some of these changes in more detail it is worth presenting the actual data relating to specific prisons in a somewhat different format. The following graph illustrates changes in adjudication levels over a 21 month period at User Voice prison 4 (beginning at April 2014, which we have used as the approximate User Voice start date for this prison), as compared with levels in comparator prison 3. We have also entered trend lines so that readers can identify the broad change, and these are clearly consistent with the categories applied in the previous table – i.e. whether the positive changes were statistically significant. It is also interesting to see how the trend lines can mask quite wide monthly variations – there was clearly a very sharp decrease during the period from April/May to June 2015 for example, and then a sharp upward spike in the next few months.

Overall, this performance against the comparator prison amounted to a difference of about 97 adjudications – that is, the estimates suggest that the User Voice prison in this case was “better off” than the comparator prison by that reduced number of adjudications during that period.

⁴⁰ The numbers in this column represent the spread (absolute value) between the average monthly figures for the period for the User Voice prison, and for the comparator prison during the same period. Those figures with an asterisk indicate statistical significance at $p < 0.05$.

Figure 12: Changes in adjudication numbers by month, for UV prison 4 and comparator prison 3

Much clearer results were obtained when the second approach described above was used. The following table summarises results for five of the User Voice prisons together (the comparison was not possible for one prison, due to different data format for the “before” period). Further details concerning the steps taken to produce these figures are provided in Appendix 1, along with some further presentations.

Table 10: Overall changes in adjudications per month – summary of UV prison performance against comparator prisons

prison	pre-period monthly average	post-period monthly average	% change in monthly average, between pre- and post-implementation periods	% change in monthly averages for comparator prison, during same periods	monthly average if UV prison had performed like comparator during post-period	total difference for post-period if UV prison had performed like comparator
UV prison 2	52.8	70.4	33%	23%	68.8	-31.4
UV prison 3	113.8	154.1	35%	45%	183.2	581.4
UV prison 4	71.9	83.1	16%	38%	103.1	400.4
UV prison 5	61.1	78.5	28%	3%	63.4	-301.1
UV prison 6	81.0	100.7	24%	38%	119.2	370.5
					Total	1019.8

As suggested by the figures in the table, if User Voice prisons had all performed in the way that their comparators had during the periods of interest, there would have been a further 1,020 adjudications than did in fact occur.

5.3.1.2 Prisoner complaints

The evidence concerning impact on levels of prisoner complaints is both more consistent and more positive than for some of the other indicators, with those positive impacts being evident both at several individual User Voice prisons and at group level. A summary table is provided below, which shows that three User Voice prisons experienced a significant drop in levels of prisoner complaints. Performance was slightly worse at the other three, but the differences in those cases were not significant.

Table 11: Changes in numbers of prisoner complaints – a comparison of performance in User Voice and comparator prisons

	Performance relative to comparator prison	Relative difference in improvement per month (no. of complaints)
User Voice prison 1	Better	6.3*
User Voice prison 2	Worse	1.6
User Voice prison 3	Better	6.1*
User Voice prison 4	Worse	1.2
User Voice prison 5	Better	14.5*
User Voice prison 6	Worse	2.9

*= significant at $p < 0.05$

Using the second approach described above, the impact of User Voice on levels of prisoner complaints appears again to have been highly positive.

Table 12: Overall changes in prisoner complaints per month – summary of UV prison performance against comparator prisons

prison	pre-period monthly average	post-period monthly average	% change in monthly average, between pre- and post-implementation periods	% change in monthly averages for comparator prison, during same periods	monthly average if UV prison had performed like comparator during post-period	total difference for post-period if UV prison had performed like comparator
UV prison 2	159.8	120.0	-25%	-26%	118.1	-26.6
UV prison 3	560.3	220.9	-61%	-17%	462.9	5324.0
UV prison 4	327.2	316.0	-3%	19%	390.9	1572.7
UV prison 5	263.1	190.5	-28%	4%	274.0	1335.4
UV prison 6	225.7	250.8	11%	-3%	219.7	-622.8
					Total	7582.7

As suggested by the figures in the table, if User Voice prisons had all performed in the way that their comparators had during the period of interest, a further 7,583 prisoner complaints would have been generated. Although the performance of User Voice prisons 2 and 6 was worse than the performance of their comparators, the overall performance of User Voice prisons clearly indicates that there was a very substantial impact on prisoner complaint levels.

5.3.1.3 Assaults on staff

Evidence concerning numbers of assaults on staff also suggest a positive impact overall, although the fact that changes in levels were actually significantly worse in one User Voice prison (as compared with levels in the comparator prison) did erode what might otherwise have been said about impact across the group as a whole. Again, the following table summarises differences in performance on this measure, between User Voice prisons and their comparator prison.

Table 13: Changes in numbers of assaults on staff – a comparison of performance in User Voice and comparator prisons

	Performance relative to comparator prison	Relative difference in improvement per month (no. of assaults on staff)
User Voice prison 1	Worse	.21*
User Voice prison 2	Better	.09
User Voice prison 3	Better	.02
User Voice prison 4	Better	.14
User Voice prison 5	Worse	.43
User Voice prison 6	Better	.05

*= significant at $p < 0.05$

Again using the second approach described above, the impact of User Voice on numbers of assaults on staff appears to have been positive.

Table 14: Overall changes in assaults on staff per month – summary of UV prison performance against comparator prisons

prison	pre-period monthly average	post-period monthly average	% change in monthly average, between pre- and post-implementation periods	% change in monthly averages for comparator prison, during same periods	monthly average if UV prison had performed like comparator during post-period	total difference for post-period if UV prison had performed like comparator
UV prison 2	3.4	3.1	-6%	200%	10.1	97.0
UV prison 3	9.4	5.0	-47%	-5%	9.0	88.2
UV prison 4	6.4	11.2	76%	149%	15.8	96.8
UV prison 5	6.4	8.8	37%	234%	21.3	200.9
UV prison 6	1.7	2.1	27%	18%	2.0	-3.0
					Total	479.8

As suggested by the figures in the table, if User Voice prisons had all performed in the way that their comparators had during the period of interest, a further 480 assaults on staff would have taken place than actually did. Again, the overall impact suggested here is impressive in spite of the variations across User Voice prison.

5.3.1.4 Prisoner on prisoner violence

The NOMS Performance Hub data concerning prisoner on prisoner violence does not suggest that there has been much change in rates during periods when User Voice has been

operating, although again, changes in those rates are uneven across User Voice prisons. Three of the prisons where performance was categorised as “worse” during the period of interest were pretty close to being static, but performance was significantly worse in one prison. Performance was better in two prisons, with the difference reaching statistical significance in one.

Details are summarised in the following table.

Table 15: Changes in numbers of prisoner on prisoner assaults – a comparison of performance in User Voice and comparator prisons

	Performance relative to comparator prison	Relative difference in improvement per month (no. of incidents of prisoner on prisoner violence)
User Voice prison 1	Worse	.04
User Voice prison 2	Better	.09
User Voice prison 3	Worse	.24
User Voice prison 4	Better	.71*
User Voice prison 5	Worse	2.3*
User Voice prison 6	Worse	.34

*= significant at $p < 0.05$

It is worth noting that monthly totals for incidents of this kind tend to be low in most prisons – with ranges from 6-15 being quite typical, and for larger population prisons, ranges of 15-40 per month also being typical.

There were also occasional gaps in such information for some prisons for some months, which was not typical for most of the NOMS Performance Hub data that the team accessed.

Again using the second approach described earlier, it still appears that User Voice has had little impact on levels of prisoner on prisoner violence. In fact, as suggested on the following table, if User Voice prisons had performed like their comparators, the figures suggest that there would have been 223 fewer incidents of prisoner on prisoner violence.

Table 16: Overall changes in prisoner on prisoner violence per month – summary of UV prison performance against comparator prisons

prison	pre-period monthly average	post-period monthly average	% change in monthly average, between pre- and post-implementation periods	% change in monthly averages for comparator prison, during same periods	monthly average if UV prison had performed like comparator during post-period	total difference for post-period if UV prison had performed like comparator
UV prison 2	8.4	15.6	86%	112%	17.9	31.0
UV prison 3	10.6	14.3	36%	18%	12.4	-41.1
UV prison 4	19.4	27.7	42%	-7%	18.1	-201.3
UV prison 5	6.8	13.4	99%	85%	12.5	-14.8
UV prison 6	1.7	2.1	27%	37%	2.3	3.1
					Total	-223.2

5.3.2 CRCs

As noted in Chapter 1, recent changes to community based services made it difficult to access any official data which could be used to assess impact on actual CRC service delivery. The team was not able to acquire NOMS Performance Hub data on breach rates, for example, although given recent changes, such information would in any case not have allowed for meaningful comparison of rates over time. This is because the previous “metric” categories have been revised in the wake of the re-apportioning of work between Probation Trusts and CRCs, and there is little in the way of accumulated data concerning these new metrics. We are also not able to access raw “offender feedback”, which could have been used to assess shifts in user views about CRC service design and delivery.

However, the qualitative dataset does suggest similar impacts to those discussed above concerning relationships between users and service staff for example, with some respondents commenting specifically on positive improvements to those relationships – and on how they might lead CRC staff to exercise their discretion differently (and in a way which could be associated with “cutting some slack” and thereby possibly reducing breaches, for example).

5.3.3 Conclusions

In relation to User Voice activities in prisons, analysis of data relating to key performance indicators does provide some evidence to suggest that User Voice has had a positive impact over time on the general “manageability” of regimes, although these impacts are uneven. Some of the changes highlighted in the analysis are both positive and statistically significant (particularly in relation to prisoner complaints, but also in relation to adjudications), and although differences between User Voice and non-User Voice comparator prisons do vary across the indicators examined by the team, when taken together, the evidence in our view

does point in a substantially positive direction, and is consistent with the other evidence collected by the team.

It is also worth noting that when significant differences are found between the performance of one prison and a comparator prison, it is always possible that the apparent difference is not caused by the intervention of interest – in this case, the activities of User Voice. After all, a significance test simply tells us that a measured difference is not due to chance – that is, it tells us that something about the User Voice prison is actually bringing about the difference in question. However, it must be concluded that a case for positive impact has been made where some measures across a group of interrelated indicators are statistically significant and where measured differences:

- are found in relation to more than just one set of prison/comparator pairs;
- are predicted by a model or theory which explains why such changes might occur, and
- are also underpinned by other key (quantitative and qualitative) datasets which form part of the overall evaluation evidence.

We would suggest that in relation to the prison data at least, the above conditions are largely met. However, the situation for CRC data is more complicated, largely because problems with available data concerning the new CRC “metrics” cannot easily be compared with previous probation data. Nevertheless, the qualitative data suggest strongly not only that User Voice work has positive impacts on individual participants, but also that some of the same processes which have clearly generated positive prison outcomes have causal efficacy in relation to the CRC work (although the context of delivery is obviously different). Again, the User Voice Theory of Change would predict this.

5.4 COSTS AND BENEFITS OF SERVICE IMPACTS

Given the Theory of Change underpinning User Voice activities, one would expect to find impacts at both individual and wider levels. Not all of these can be monetised precisely but are very important nonetheless, and should be highlighted.

In relation to User Voice work in prisons specifically it is noted earlier (section 5.2.1) that a range of issues have been addressed successfully further to Council activities, and the list presented (in the boxed section “*An overview of operational outcomes identified by staff*”) is impressive in illustrating the breadth of specific changes – each one of which would have had some positive impact on perceived quality of life. Outcomes of that kind also reinforce the point made earlier about difficulties associated with using numbers of actual Council members to establish unit costs. Many of the outcomes listed would have had a much larger group of “beneficiaries” associated with them.

In terms of unit costs and how these compare with the costs of events recorded in the NOMS Performance Hub performance indicator data, the team was struck with how small a change would need to be for User Voice to be cost-effective. Changes in the number of proven adjudications provide a good example of what we have in mind here.

There are several cost estimates which can be found in official documentation and other research in relation to adjudications, although many of these proved to be unreliable on closer examination. A recent study of adjudications released by the Howard League (2015) for example, estimates that adjudications cost the prison system between £400-500K per year, but when divided into the number of adjudications for the year in question (according to official NOMS data), this estimate yields an average cost of just under £5, which we know from other research to be a significant under-estimate.

Similarly, official NOMS documentation (such as their “Unit Cost” spreadsheet from 2011) has pegged the average cost of “simple” and “complex” adjudications at £62 and £114 respectively, which both the team’s assessment of the actual formal procedures (involved in processing an adjudication) and informal feedback from prison staff also suggest is inaccurate.

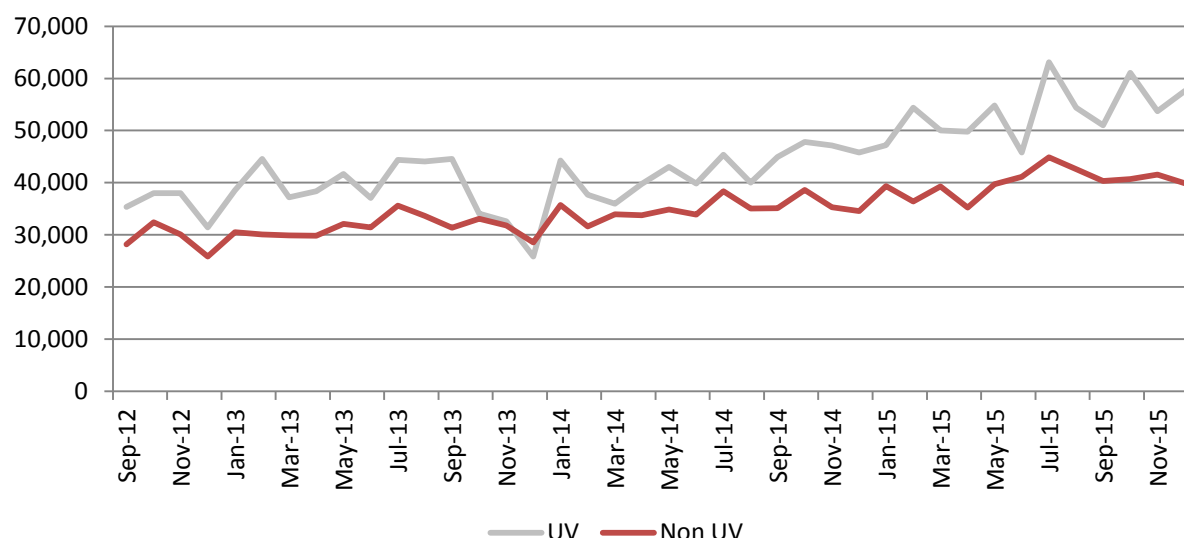
Documents such as the “Prison Discipline Procedures” (PSI 47/2011) suggests that the adjudications procedure can involve up to seven separate forms, a Reporting Officer and an Adjudication Liaison Officer, sometimes an independent adjudicator and the Governor, and in some cases also, the police.

Using figures from the New Economy toolkit for similar legal and court proceedings, the team developed an estimated cost of £321 for a “simple” and £1,344 for a “complex” adjudication processing, and applied these estimates to monthly figures from the NOMS data (for proven adjudications).⁴¹

We have used those figures to estimate the costs over time for proven adjudications, both in User Voice and non-User Voice prisons. Details are summarised on the following table. (The non-User Voice figures are included for the sake of interest rather than comparison – we knew that levels of proven adjudications would be lower in non-User Voice prisons because of the composition of that latter group⁴².) But what is striking in the figure is the cost line for User Voice prisons, which shows how small a positive change in the levels of proven adjudications would need to be, to cancel out monthly operating costs.

⁴¹ The first of these figures is based on the estimated unit cost of a court hearing for breach, and has been uplifted to 2015 figures; the original is based on National Audit Office figures reproduced within the New Economy toolkit. The figure is consistent with the description of adjudication procedures referred to in the text, and also with feedback from prison managers and staff, who have described for us how long the various steps require, and which staff members are involved in the process. The estimate covers the involvement of an officer who places the prisoner on report and processes the paperwork, officers who escort to the event, an officer who reports at the event, an officer who manages the hearing room, some time for the Governor to be involved as required, and subsequent time for further paperwork to be completed. The estimate for complex adjudications is based on estimated costs for a court appearance for a moderate level offence – and amalgamates estimates for a range of offence types as used in the toolkit; again, the estimate is chosen to allow for the fact that complex adjudications can involve adjournments, the attendance of witnesses, legal counsel or Mackenzie friends, outside adjudicators and the police. More complex cases can also involve pre-hearing segregation proceedings, and special proceedings to assess fitness for hearing.

⁴² It would not be unexpected to find that levels of proven adjudications are generally higher in User Voice prisons than in non-User Voice prisons, given that the organisation has tended to deliver its work in some very difficult prisons.

Figure 13: Average monthly costs of proven adjudications, for User Voice and non-User Voice prisons

The above graph covers both simple and complex adjudications, and we know from the published data that about 80% of adjudications are simple, and 20% are complex, so even small positive shifts in complex adjudication numbers (e.g. for incidents involving violence) could have a significant impact on within-prison expenditure.

It is also useful to apply these costings to some of the results presented in the previous section. For adjudications in particular, some of the comparative analysis in particular suggested that User Voice prisons were “better off” than their comparators by 1,020 adjudications, across five of those prisons and time periods during which they have been running. If we assume that the same 80/20 split between complex and simple adjudications applies to that number, and cost them using the estimates provided above, we can estimate the benefits outlined on the following table.

Table 17: Estimated value of “adjudications benefit” associated with positive performance at User Voice prisons

	Simple	Complex	Total
Number	816	204	1020
Cost	£261,881	£274,118	£535,999

As the table makes clear, the positive performance of User Voice prisons in relation to their comparator prisons is associated with a substantial overall benefit.

More generally, the following table illustrates how reductions in simple and complex adjudications are linked to monthly benefits (using the same costings as described earlier, and a monthly average for User Voice prisons of 84 adjudications per month, and the same 80/20 split between simple and complex adjudications). It is worth noting that even the level of reductions in the first tier would generate benefits that exceed the average monthly running costs of User Voice.

Table 18: Benefits generated by monthly reductions in simple and complex adjudications

simple	complex	benefit	% drop in average monthly occurrences to produce this
5	1	2,949	7%
10	2	5,898	14%
15	3	8,847	21%
20	4	11,796	29%
25	5	14,745	36%
30	6	17,694	43%
35	7	20,643	50%
40	8	23,592	57%

In terms of other outcome indicators discussed in previous sections, the evidence also suggests that User Voice activities have had a positive impact on reduced assaults on prison staff. If we regard incidents of that sort to be much like complex adjudications in terms of their resource implications, then a total of 480 staff assaults could be costed at £645,120⁴³, although it is worth noting that there would be overlap between this category and the broader category of adjudications.

If we also costed apparent changes in levels of prisoner on prisoner violence in the same manner, the above would be tempered somewhat by an additional cost of £299,712 (from 223 extra incidents each being costed in the same way as a complex adjudication), but the overall cost picture obviously remains highly positive in terms of User Voice impact on prison regimes.

The team did not estimate costs for dealing with prisoner complaints, but the User Voice impact on levels of complaints would clearly also have a positive cost-benefit dimension, given the large numbers suggested by the analysis⁴⁴.

It is worth noting that none of the amounts referred to above are immediately “cashable” savings if an intervention facilitates them⁴⁵ – but they represent a significant staff resource which can certainly be re-allocated when reductions occur.

It is also likely that reductions in adjudication would be linked to reductions in the use of segregation, although the team could not access reliable data in relation to possible changes over time, between User Voice and non-User Voice prisons.

⁴³ That is, £1,344, times 480 events.

⁴⁴ The team could not find a reliable estimate of the average cost of dealing with a prisoner complaint, or a breakdown of complaints by type from the national figures. Given the huge variety of individual complaints (both by issue and level of seriousness) it was not possible to calculate a reliable average cost without further detail.

⁴⁵ Calculating the cashability of costed benefits over time can be complicated, because benefits vary widely in terms of their type and timing. At some level, all benefits are cashable eventually (if they lead to budget reductions for example); for a useful discussion of issues concerning cashability, see New Economy (2015).

In the light of other evidence it would not be unreasonable to expect that in the longer term there may have been such reductions. If so it is worth noting again that reductions could be fairly marginal and still generate cost-able benefits approaching the monthly User Voice delivery costs (although it is also worth noting that there is an uneven relationship between staffing costs, and levels of occupancy in segregation units)⁴⁶.

As can be seen from the following table, a reduction in one month's use of segregation for one person (or several persons in aggregate) would be associated with reduced staffing costs that are significant in relation to monthly User Voice delivery costs.⁴⁷

Table 19: Staffing costs relating to segregation, on average, per month

	Total staffing cost, annual	Staffing cost total, per month	Average unit costs (i.e. per occupant)	Average unit cost per month
Small unit (1 – 10 cells)	207,443	41,489	41,489	3,457
Medium unit (11-20 cells)	284,110	18,941	18,941	1,578
Large unit (20 or more cells)	339,893	16,995	16,995	1,416
			overall average monthly unit cost	2,151

5.4.1 Summary and conclusions

It was illustrated in previous sections of this Chapter that User Voice has had a positive impact on a range of indicators relating to service provision, and the further analysis presented in this section has highlighted some of the costs and benefits associated with those impacts.

Although these impacts are uneven, when taken together and assessed in cost-benefit terms it is quite clear that User Voice activities (in prison in particular) have generated benefits that far outstrip the operating costs referred to earlier.

In relation to changes in levels of adjudications for example, the analysis suggests that User Voice activity is associated with benefits of £535,999 across the five User Voice prisons where the team was able to undertake before and after rate comparisons (with comparators, during periods of User Voice operation).

⁴⁶ It should also be pointed out that segregation is not used solely as a punishment for rule infractions; it is sometimes used in cases where a particular prisoner is felt to be in danger, for example.

⁴⁷ Figures are based on those in *Operating Model: Service Specification for Prisoner Discipline and Segregation (P2.0) NOMS 26/1/2010*, but have been uplifted to 2015 figures.

These benefits are particularly impressive when it is noted that there are numerous other aspects of impact which we were not in a position to cost because of limitations in the data, such as changes in the use of segregation for example, or relative changes in numbers of prisoner complaints. Changes in these areas will also have had positive cost-benefit dimensions, which would be additional to those that we have looked at specifically.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

There are clear normative rationales and instrumental incentives for service user involvement in policy and practice development in the criminal justice system, as discussed in Chapter 1. The impetus for and value of co-productive practices, and in particular Prison and Community Councils, remain largely theoretical and precariously dependent on the recognition of the symbolic and normative value of such involvement. There is, however, some direct and indirect research evidence to suggest that Prison and Community Councils *in general* have potential to encourage institutional and relational legitimacy and in so doing, to promote a culture of cooperation and to contribute to change at an individual, organisational and community level (Solomon and Edgar, 2004). This evaluation offers a further contribution to the empirical data on outcomes for service users and service providers alike in terms of the User Voice models of Prison and Community Councils.

User Voice's Prison and Community Councils, first set up in 2009 and 2011 respectively, are premised on a Theory of Change which identifies key activities and outputs involving prisoners and those subject to community supervision in association with service providers, namely prison Governors/Directors/prison staff and CRC chief executives/practitioners. The aim of the Councils is to increase engagement between prisoners and service users and those tasked with their care, supervision and rehabilitation; to increase prisoners' and service users' personal and skills development, access to positive role models and opportunities for civic engagement; and to work towards greater [cost] effectiveness of services designed to reduce re-offending and improve the life chances of people with convictions.

This chapter draws on the findings from the evaluation to reveal the value of User Voice as a service provider for Prison and Community Councils and to discuss the key themes emerging from the analysis of the operation of the Councils before concluding on their effectiveness, impact and future potential.

6.2 THE VALUE ADDED OF THE USER VOICE COUNCIL MODEL

The User Voice Council model was viewed by many as an innovative and progressive initiative to assist in reshaping penal and probation practices. Incorporating 'the user's voice' was seen as beneficial, both operationally (and thus instrumentally) and normatively, as a value in and of itself, as 'the right thing to do'. Many stakeholders, operational staff, commissioners, and Council participants believed that the Council had real value.

The User Voice model...was not a *prisoner* Council but a *prison* Council with the distinction being it belonged to everybody who worked and lived in the prison, and that changes the whole... sense of ownership (Scoping interview 3).

The User Voice Councils are unique, partly because User Voice's front line or operational staff are all 'ex-offenders' who work in partnership, co-productively, with *both* prisoners, service users and staff within a Council context to achieve better outcomes and efficiency. Our analysis of participants' perspectives informed by research into co-production suggests that the value added of User Voice can be summarised in terms of:

- its commitment to, focus on and time devoted to 'user' engagement, rather than it representing an add-on to current provision;
- its credibility with service users and prisoners as an organisation led by and focused on people with experiences which imbue them with a sense of mutual trust and understanding;
- its capacity to hold agencies to account;
- the fact that it is independent from the commissioning organisations.

The Council model's *exclusive* focus on prisoner and service user engagement in criminal justice matters is one outcome of its independent status, which means that it does not become an add-on or tokenistic, which is all too often the experience of service users more broadly. In a study conducted by Beresford (2006), service users of wider social services highlighted two activities as central to making user involvement work. These are: *people being able to get together to work collectively for change and mutual support*, and the *importance of making known their own experience, views and ideas*, and these mechanisms for and processes of user involvement, or co-production, reside at the heart of the User Voice Council model.

Perceptions of the purposes of User Voice Councils in this evaluation were to provide a formalised structure through which the voices of prisoners and service users could be channelled, and to facilitate a two-way consultative process through which matters of collective concern might be resolved. This model and approach was widely considered to generate mutually beneficial outcomes (discussed further below) for both service providers and prisoners/service users.

The value added of User Voice Councils resides in the fact that not only are they independent from prisons and CRCs but they are also managed and run by a user-led organisation which offers credibility, accountability and legitimacy, not only amongst the commissioners of the Councils but also amongst the prisoner and service user populations. Indeed, many stakeholders acknowledged that User Voice's strength lay in its independence from, but direct experience of, criminal justice interventions, what one senior CRC manager described as 'an odd credibility'.

It's about the ethos of the organisation, it's about the fact that it's very much of and for service users, it has that element of independence but it can still work with the larger organisations. So I think that gives them an odd credibility (CRC, Area B).

It's not rocket science, is it, really? It's just the fact that you can't – I guess it's much harder to engage with someone who hasn't lived the experience and I think that's unique... I think that carries more weight than a lot of people think (User Voice, senior manager).

The enthusiasm [the User Voice worker] showed, and being an ex-offender, you know, gave me the impression that he wanted to change things because he really passionately believes in changing stuff rather than it being about just a job (Council member, Area A).

The independent status and thus externality of User Voice as a service provider also means that they can hold the host agency to account.

They make people accountable...they can get into the nooks and crannies cos they have got time to do that. I haven't got time to do that (Prison Officer, Area B).

Basically, things are being achieved. The managers of the various departments now have to take a vested interest in what's happening...they are answering questions now... [Prisoners] are not always gonna get what they want but they know things will be listened to and a decision will be made (Prison Officer, Area C).

Moreover, User Voice' staff members are considered adept at working collaboratively with 'function heads' in prisons and senior managers in CRCs, and could – as an independent external agency – hold such staff to account to ensure that proposals were implemented as planned. This was helped by the fact that, as one Governor described it, User Voice staff had a 'unique dynamic' in terms of engaging both staff and service users alike. One prison participant highlighted the importance of how the Council brings collective accountability to the prison environment:

I just liked the concept and the idea of User Voice because it leads to accountability. I think most jails across the board, but here in particular, you'll have everyone sitting in their own little silos and they don't want to interact, they don't want to converse, they don't want to engage, and if you do assist in trying to engage or converse, you'll either be shipped out, or there's a report about you, so you've got all things on your record just for trying to do the right thing. Nobody wants to be destructive or anything, we're trying to be constructive. This is where we live, this is our address and if things are efficient, a bit of continuity, it benefits the people providing the services and the ones who are trying to access them (Prison Council interviewee, Area A).

Beyond credibility, the user-led aspect of User Voice imbues staff with trustworthiness in the eyes of prisoners and service users. Such legitimacy is encouraged by a sense of identification between Council members and User Voice staff through shared experience and prisoners and service users' perceptions of a reduced social distance compared to that between themselves and prison officers or CRC staff.

If a prisoner says [to other prisoners] 'look this is what we need to do to get [the Governor] to listen to us', they tend to listen to a prisoner a lot more than what they do us...It's the trust (Prison Officer, Area C).

That [User Voice staff member coming in] has a legitimacy and a credibility amongst prisoners that I'll never have and that helps them to inspire prisoners (Scoping interview 3).

When senior managers were asked why they chose User Voice as the medium to encourage greater engagement of service users in policy and practice, some wished to stress the fact that User Voice was only 'one piece of the jigsaw' in service user involvement, but nevertheless a crucial one because of its externality (independence) and user-led status (employing ex-offenders). Whilst some prison governors and indeed CRCs had 'inherited' the User Voice contract and its services, others chose User Voice specifically because they had an established and strong track record and were 'very passionate' about their work. In geographical areas where User Voice was already known to either the prisons or the CRC, this enabled continuity at a time when prisons and CRCs increasingly had a common agenda of rehabilitation and reintegration. One CRC senior manager described User Voice as 'an independent broker... an ex-offender organisation [which] gave it credibility... They weren't part of the local politics', and another suggested that ex-offenders could demonstrate to current offenders that there was a different way to progress through the criminal justice system – they were 'living proof' that offenders could 'turn their lives around', find employment, and give back to their communities.

6.3 THEORY OF CHANGE OUTCOMES

6.3.1 *Engagement and impact*

Motivations for participation in User Voice Councils varied between different settings. Council members in prison articulated expressive (satisfaction with normative or morally good actions) and solidarity oriented (derived from their sense of belonging to a group) incentives for participation motivated by altruistic concerns, or collective and cooperative motives. This was expressed as a desire to influence change in prison conditions enabled by having their voices heard which, in recognition of their experiences as service users – described by one Council member as 'experts by experience' - was deemed the vehicle through which change might be engendered. For Community Council members, their incentives for participation in the Councils were expressed in intrinsic terms (i.e. in terms of realising a sense of self-determination or competence) and expressive terms (in terms of deriving satisfaction from normative or morally good actions) – and in particular, by helping others; their motives tended thus towards the personal although the intended outcomes of their participation benefited the collective. The expression 'leaving a legacy' epitomises such motives, as one prisoner remarked: [You] take a lot of joy away with you, when you know you've done something good for someone else'. All Council members who were involved in this evaluation suggested that the Councils made a difference whether that be to the logistics of prison or CRC policy and practice, to levels of respect and mutual understanding between staff and service users, or to developing their own skills and levels of confidence.

This resonates with Riessman's (1965) 'helper therapy principle' - whatever the underpinning motive or intention, helping others helps the helper. Thus, what emerged across the settings was an emphasis, albeit differently conceptualised, on generativity. Maruna (2001) identified

that involvement in ‘generative activities’ (which make a contribution to the well-being of others) plays a part in testifying to the desister that an alternative agentic identity is being or has been forged. Maruna (2001: 7) contends that desistance is only possible when ex-offenders ‘develop a coherent pro-social identity for themselves’, and he stresses the salience of involvement in ‘generative activities’ as critical to the desistance process. Relatedly, Uggen et al (2004) specify the varieties of civic participation that contribute to such a pro-social and desistance-oriented identity which includes activities associated with the Theory of Change, for example, active citizenship and role modelling.

6.3.2 *Personal and skills development*

In terms of personal development, Council members identified that participation in the User Voice Councils gave them a sense of purpose and an enhanced sense of empathy towards and tolerance of others which impacted on their modes of interaction and, in turn, relationships with others. Professional staff observed an attitudinal change in participants, specifically, a shift in their self-perception, enhanced self-esteem, increased self-confidence and improved levels of interpersonal trust. In particular, Council members referred to improved relationships with professional staff; they attributed a reduced relational distance between themselves and professional staff directly to their participation in the Council.

Some Council members in the community felt that their employability skills had been enhanced through participation in the Council. It should be noted, however, that most Council participants, in both settings, self-reported a high level of skills prior to participation in the Council. This might reflect methodological challenges surrounding self-reported data but it does make it difficult to determine the effect of Council participation on skills development.

6.3.3 *Role modelling and positive peer support networks*

The “wounded healer” role of ex-offenders held significant symbolic and practical value for Council participants. For Prison Council participants, engaging with ex-offenders in the prison environment was powerful. Many viewed User Voice employees as “motivational” because of their post-release successes. Community Council participants were modelling the mentoring roles of User Voice employees to their peers, as a means to both help others and help themselves. Interviewees also talked about finding inspiration from the work of User Voice and its staff, and expressed a desire to assume an advocacy role themselves. Community participants, in particular, found the general peer support they gained from working with other ex-offenders to be most valuable. Part of this was linked to stigma and shame, and finding a ‘safe space’ within the User Voice organisation. Many talked about ‘being comfortable’ around other service users because they didn’t have to “hide” their history. This shared status fostered a sense of ‘freedom’ and ‘peace’ amongst Council members. Nearly all interviewees indicated that their status as ‘ex-offenders’ (or as service users) allowed them a greater level of empathy towards others in the system. Being advocates for, and role models to, other ex-offenders was identified as a primary motivator to engaging in the Council.

6.3.4 Active citizenship

Crick (2002:2) defines active citizenship as the ‘rights to be exercised as well as agreed responsibilities’. Associated activities include engagement in public services, volunteering and democratic participation (Crick, 2000; Lister 2003), which are undoubtedly manifest in active Council membership. One Council member, in particular, suggested that both expressing their views (described as ‘having a voice’) and having those views heard enabled them to transcend the self- and social-stigma experienced by and conferred on those in the criminal justice system. Participating in Council activities was also considered to enhance a sense of agency which, in conjunction with generative concerns (discussed above) not only builds human and social capital but may consolidate and support motivations to change, or, in other words, be a vehicle for expressing a shift in identity and a vehicle for desistance, one which is, critically, dependent on social recognition (Barry, 2015).

6.4 THE IMPACT OF USER VOICE ON SERVICE PROVISION

Impacts on services were discussed in terms of operational outcomes, relational-cultural outcomes, relational-environmental outcomes and [cost] effective outcomes. It was widely recognised that end-user feedback and consultation on service provision and delivery could only enhance the efficacy and efficiency of services, with regard to shared and intended outcomes. The qualitative data revealed a range of operational outcomes associated directly with the User Voice Councils which included, for example, the provision of in-cell phones in prison and the provision and distribution of delayed allocation of clothing and changes to the appearance and fabric of waiting rooms in CRC officers and the establishment and recruitment of engagement workers in one CRC.

The relational-cultural outcome included a reduction in perceptions of historical or traditional barriers between professionals and prisoners or service users and, indeed, improved relationships and interpersonal dynamics which seemed to imply, if not reinforce, arguments towards a more participatory approach towards service design, development and delivery.

The relational-environmental outcomes suggested that the activities of the Councils had led to an improved quality of life and/or experience of services for prisoners and service users but which also had the effect, in prisons, of creating the space for prison officers to work more proactively rather than reactively.

Also concerning User Voice impacts on services, the evidence suggests that User Voice has had a strong and positive impact on the manageability and perceived legitimacy of prison regimes, although some aspects of this have been difficult to quantify, and the causes of such changes are questioned by some interview respondents.

More specifically “improved manageability” within User Voice prisons appears to have involved reductions in problematic incidents/events, and although these impacts are uneven, our analysis of data concerning reductions in adjudications (and assaults on staff within that) and prisoner complaints show this kind of positive impact quite clearly.

6.5 COSTS AND BENEFITS

There is sufficient evidence to allow us to conclude that User Voice is cost-effective in the sense that it generates sufficient benefits to outweigh its costs – the threshold level of change required to justify its existence financially is not very high, and appears to be exceeded in relation to benefits generated both at individual and service levels.

In terms of impacts on individual User Voice participants, although the team was hampered somewhat in the analysis by a lack of data on individual participants, the qualitative data and the evidence generated in relation to the case studies clearly indicate that User Voice activities are associated with a range of cost-able benefits, including reductions in offending, and the effective resolution of practical issues often faced by people involved with the criminal justice system (such as substance misuse, issues with mental health, and employment). In spite of the data gaps, this evidence is sufficient to illustrate large cost-able benefits – and also to illustrate that large savings can be made in relation even to very small numbers of participants where such changes have been experienced.

In terms of impacts on services, in relation to changes in levels of adjudications for example, the analysis suggests that User Voice activity is associated with benefits well in excess of £500,000 across the five User Voice prisons where the team was able to undertake before and after rate comparisons (with comparators). These benefits are particularly impressive when it is noted that there are numerous other aspects of impact which we were not in a position to cost because of limitations in the data, such as changes in the use of segregation for example, or relative changes in numbers of prisoner complaints. Changes in these areas will also have had positive cost-benefit dimensions, which would be additional to those that we have looked at specifically.

Positive changes in relation to problematic incidents in User Voice prisons obviously generate benefits to prison managers in particular, which, although they are not directly “cashable”, can be re-deployed internally in a positive manner.

In addition, the evidence suggests that User Voice projects can and do generate positive outcomes which cannot be costed precisely, but which can have a significant impact on the lives of prisoners and participants in the community.

6.6 CHALLENGES TO THE USER VOICE COUNCIL MODEL

The following sections of this chapter offer recommendations for Council improvement, refinement and reflection where appropriate to the topic under discussion.

It was widely agreed that the model of Community and Prison Councils was both unique and highly effective, not only as a means of improving services but also as a vehicle for the personal development of its members. However, User Voice tends to try to replicate the Council model within both prison and community settings, and senior managers in particular felt that this was a constraint on taking full advantage of the model. Challenges experienced by having a more rigid Council model include, for example, the extent to which both User Voice staff and Council members can move around the prison to engage with other prisoners,

restrictions on the number of prisoners who can meet at any one time for the purpose of conducting Council business, and sustaining Council membership in prisons with a rapidly changing population. In the community setting, the geographical spread and diversity of the service user population does not necessarily allow for the current model to operate across all areas or all groups. These challenges suggest that while the Council model may be implemented consistently across prisons and CRCs, there is perhaps scope for a level of flexibility around its manner of operation as befits different settings and contexts. As the success of the model becomes increasingly evident amongst service providers, there is now a realisation that the model could actually be utilised more broadly if it were more flexible, thereby allowing for different cultures, needs and aspirations within and between the various CRC and prison settings within which it operates.

Recommendation 1: that the Council model be adaptable and flexible enough to be tailored to the needs of different penal, cultural and operational settings.

User Voice staff strongly suggested that there was no other agency like User Voice that might be in competition with it precisely because it was a unique user-led organisation.

There isn't anyone... There's no one doing this. A few people might claim to do it but there's no one doing it from a user led perspective... being led and delivered by people with that personal experience... they're skilled professionals able to use their personal experience (User Voice senior manager).

However, whilst there may be no other organisation like it, User Voice is rightly concerned that prisons and CRCs could offer the same or a similar service in-house, not least when – as one governor put it – the model is not 'copyrighted', although User Voice would argue that the intellectual property is asserted through its published material:

Our biggest competition is them doing it themselves, not any other organisation doing it... We know how to do it... we know all the pitfalls... there are risks involved. How are you making sure that the people who're involved are in it for the right reasons?... if it's not representative of the prison and you're not getting the full spectrum of people... the decisions you're then making are based on a particular view... we can give you much more of that (User Voice, senior manager).

However, prisons perhaps more than CRCs were not convinced that Councils necessarily needed User Voice. Whilst some suggested that User Voice Councils were value for money, even 'a bargain', three prison senior managers equally implied that it could be run as cost-effectively, if not more so, by employing ex-offenders directly and giving more autonomy to service users to consult with their counterparts both in the community and in prisons.

I could employ, directly, two ex-offenders, for example. I could do that for the same money... I would get the benefits of being seen as somebody who employs ex-offenders directly, which is good. I would carry the same benefits and risks of working with an ex-offender... I'd probably get more time on the ground from somebody... If the model is about running an election for prisoners, having a group of prisoners who are talking to prison managers, and employing ex-offenders to give that some support, anybody could do that. I could do that... What's ultimately important [is] whether the

service users find it credible... I don't think it really matters whether it's User Voice or anybody else or whether it's in-house. I think the most important part is about people believing in it, that it's seen to work (Prison governor, Area C).

However, three other senior managers and two operational staff members suggested that whilst it *could* be done in house, it would lose its credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of service users in particular, and would not be as cost-effective as dedicating a budget to an external agency. Arguably, an internally provided model would also struggle to hold the relevant agencies to account which, as we discussed above, was one aspect of the value added. Equally, as the quotes below illustrate, in the context of competing organisational priorities in a climate of budget cuts and, relatedly, reduced staffing levels, the commitment to in-house provision might quickly be overwhelmed by other concerns and become an add-on rather than an integral part of service delivery, the latter of which, as we outlined before, is critical to co-productive approaches (Eriksson, 2011).

[Interviewer: If you'd had the choice and you probably did have, might you have used a different service provider?] I'd have done it ourselves. I'd have done it ourselves but it wouldn't be anywhere near as.... I've done it loads of times in the past in every jail I've been in, had some form of prisoner council or forum that I would be at and the reason they don't work is because whoever I give it to, it's part of their job to organise it and the admin and the running round and recruiting and making sure everything works is a lot of time. So there's 2 guys here 2 days a week and all their time is taken up with it. I couldn't have someone 4 days a week doing that. It's impossible. I can't employ someone to do that. So it would be a tag on to someone's job and, because of that, it's never given the amount of time it requires to work properly. So we would have done it in-house and it wouldn't have been as successful cos they never are (Prison governor, Area B).

When they go into an office and they go into a waiting room and there's a group of offenders sitting there, they can say, oh we're from User Voice, we're not probation and we'd like to talk to you about your experience of being on probation...it would be quite difficult to replicate that if we did it internally... and that [independence] is useful and it's also, they're quite persistent, they will keep coming back (CRC Staff, Area B).

[Because] it's not in-house ... I think that stops things perhaps being whitewashed under the table...it has a lot more respect and substance (Prison Officer, Area C).

First of all, we can't get hold of prison officers to do it and secondly, we haven't got a job description for a prison officer that would allow us to do it (Prison governor, Area B)

However, we would suggest that a further difficulty with providing an internal or in-house council would reside in the distinct manner of relating that the User Voice Council model requires. Traditional relational dynamics between service providers and service users in the criminal justice system have historically and traditionally been premised on power differentials and assumed authority, which can undermine attempts at collaboration and coproduction between these differently situated persons (Slay and Stephens 2013).

The culture of prisons, prison staff and managers and prisoners themselves, is such that it is very, very difficult for them to take on board those issues in a different way. People are very culturally programmed to operate in a certain way... in some establishments, with let's say very strong and maybe more enlightened management teams you could, but I would say in the majority of establishments, you wouldn't get that impact (Prison governor, Area B).

All stakeholders interviewed recognised that the Councils are intended for 'everybody' and, as part of that, oriented to improving outcomes not just for prisoners or service users but for services more broadly. We found that the extent to which this purpose is realised in practice is constrained, in certain contexts, by the absence of 'buy-in' from operational staff (notably prison officers and offender managers/administrators). Despite one prison officer suggesting that increased participation in the Council meeting by prison officers was not necessarily as effective as a *core* group of Council members and professional staff who knew and trusted each other, increasing buy-in from operational staff was seen as crucial in terms of 'ownership'.

Recommendation 2: that greater consideration is given to involving more ground staff on a day to day basis in the operation of the Councils to increase their buy-in to the process and outcomes.

Relatedly, and perhaps why buy-in from front-line staff has sometimes been perceived to be more limited than it could be, one of the key challenges to the process and operation of the Council model comes from potential staff resistance to or obstruction of the Council's operations. Across all three areas and within both prison and community contexts, but perhaps more acutely in the prison context, staff reported varying degrees of resistance due in part to a lack of understanding of the purpose of the Council and its potential outcomes. There was an implied fear of undermining professionalism if the Council represented a blurring professional boundaries and moving traditional hierarchical power relations towards a more consensual relationship between staff and service users. How the Council is 'sold' to ground staff is crucial in this regard, not least if Councils are seen by some staff as duplicating other initiatives such as PIDs or PCGs.

Recommendation 3: that Engagement Team Leaders adapt their initial presentations and ongoing liaison with ground staff to ensure a greater understanding of the role of Councils within the service and the complementary rather than competing role of User Voice staff and Council members in addressing common concerns.

Linked to the above is the importance of ensuring buy-in from senior officials and management teams within CRCs and prisons. Although many of the prison Governors in this evaluation personally contracted with User Voice, this did not always guarantee buy-in from other senior members in the establishment. Several User Voice frontline staff members suggested that one way to achieve greater Council embeddedness (and buy-in) within the prison setting was to better liaise with senior management (both personally and organisationally). One User Voice staff member described the ways in which he tried to encourage support and backing from senior managers:

I do my best to work with them, not against them... I think sometimes they see me coming down the walkway in my [User Voice] shirt and automatically think I'm going to create a headache for them – more work, or demands. I see that look on their faces. So I just stop, and I ask how their day is. Maybe share a coffee, and listen to their concerns. It's basically what I do with the lads... I think there should be more of this. Everyone in prison wants to get heard; wants to know that someone's listening. (User Voice staff, Area A)

Recommendation 4: that Engagement Team Leaders, and User Voice as an organisation, liaise closely with senior commissioning staff to ensure a greater understanding of the role of Councils within the service and working with (or 'through') them to address common concerns.

Another User Voice staff member suggested that contracts between the organisation and the contracting body make clear what is needed and expected from both parties in order to (i) manage expectations, and (ii) ensure service delivery can be achieved with greater success. Specifically, he suggested that User Voice identify the ways in which council implementation/facilitation is 'helped or hindered', and to work with the contractor prior to engagement to help mitigate these. In the prison setting, for example, clearly stating that User Voice employees will require unfettered access around the prison and to prisoners, and to address security concerns upfront. Some frontline staff were able to carry keys around the prison (which allowed for easy access and movement), though others were not, thus hindering their movement and placing a greater operational burden on prison staff.

Recommendation 5: that User Voice considers contractual stipulations outlining the ways in which service delivery can best be achieved with the assistance of the service provider.

6.7 THE THROUGH-THE-GATE MODEL

Once the Transforming Rehabilitation programme of change becomes more established, it is undoubtedly the case that service providers both in prisons and in the community will seek to offer a more 'seamless service' to service users in the hope of encouraging reintegration and desistance. Professional interview respondents were unanimous in their positive response to the Through-The-Gate Council model which was considered particularly innovative, and indeed essential to rehabilitation:

When service users are released from prison, it's a real critical time... and if they've actually participated in the Prison Council... satisfaction from doing that ... the fact that there is support available for them when they come through-the-gate is incredibly important. I think that the Community Councils, the fact that they've got something to do with their day, they've got a purpose, a reason to get up in the morning, and being supported by their peers, they're doing something constructive, they feel valued, they feel listened to (Scoping interview 5).

Equally, it was felt important by some stakeholders to establish closer links between prison and community more generally, suggesting that greater collaboration between Prison and Community Councils would strengthen the case for a Through-The-Gate model of working. Logistically, however, the Community Councils would have to go to the Prison Councils, rather

than vice versa. Despite an acknowledgement that the particular operation of the model used in prisons (e.g., elections to parties) could not be replicated in the community because of different settings and cultures, greater collaboration between the two would enable the sharing of success stories and issues which could encourage each Council to learn from the other and ensure greater continuity of Council involvement ‘through the gate’.

Many Prison and Community Council members felt that their achievements were not regularly ‘made public’. This was seen as an important part of general record keeping, but also celebrating Council achievements with both staff and other prisoners. Monthly newsletters, kiosk notifications, more signage within prisons and CRC offices and prison journal articles were all suggested as means of celebrating their successes.

[Prisoners] don’t know what they can come to you about, they don’t know what they can raise, what we do. We’re not very good at actually publicising... we’re not really going out there and banging our drums saying ‘we’ve achieved this, this and this, this week... Maybe we need to be better at communicating (Focus Group member, Area C).

Recommendation 6: that User Voice encourages greater collaboration and dissemination of activities/publicity between Prison and Community Councils and between prisons and CRCs more widely.

6.8 STAFFING

Some participants expressed concern over the lack of consistency and continuity in User Voice employees, primarily in the prison setting but also in the community setting where Council members could feel isolated from the organisation. Council members and the wider service user population need to understand the constraints within which User Voice staff are working – for example, being denied access to prison wings for security or safety reasons, or due to staffing shortages. Many Prison Council members also felt that User Voice employees should be more present in the prison – engaging with prisoners and staff, as well as just increasing visibility. Some thought that having two User Voice employees for each Prison Council, and on a more full-time basis, would be helpful in terms of greater outreach and achieving goals. Some prison Governors/Directors also commented on the inhibitors to engagement with staff and prisoners alike if User Voice staff are rarely visible within the prison.

Recommendation 7: that User Voice considers with service providers how to achieve a greater presence of Engagement Team Members within the CRCs/prisons in order to boost contact with both service users and ground staff.

For community participants, a recurring suggestion was to have a more present and active council advocate. In the prison setting, it was often the Governor/Director who set the tone and endorsed the council. Because they were personally responsible for contracting with User Voice, Governors/Directors were motivated to make it successful. Structurally, the CRC is a more diverse organisation which poses difficulties in finding council advocates to help initiate change and motivate CRC ground staff to ‘own’ the results. Relatedly, actioning proposals seemed particularly difficult for the Community Councils, given the lack of an advocate on the

ground, which meant that many participants saw little or no changes made from their feedback and council meeting deliberations.

Recommendation 8: that the CRCs have an equivalent to the Prison Governor/Director and any dedicated prison officers who can advocate on behalf of Community Council members.

The one female interviewee from the Community Council suggested that User Voice should provide more outreach and support to women in prison by, for example, having a Council in a women's prison – but other participants also mentioned the lack of throughcare support for those on release into the community, despite some CRCs already having throughcare workers/mentors who fulfil this role to a certain extent].

Recommendation 9: that User Voice is more proactive in signposting released Prison Council members to services within the local communities to which they are returning.

6.9 DATA COLLECTION

User Voice's new database should help the organisation to continue gathering systematic and rigorous data on Council participants and activities, and its use should also help to facilitate wider involvement of User Voice staff in data collection and evaluation activities (and thus generate wider 'buy-in' to those activities and help to mainstream them organisationally). However, it will be important to ensure that Council participants give feedback and other relevant demographic information on a systematic and regular basis, to reduce the likelihood of a high attrition rate or inconsistent follow-up periods.

6.9.1 Future use of IOMI

Now that the use of IOMI has bedded down in most areas, and that the User Voice database has a 'bolt-on' sheet for IOMI data entry, the User Voice team might consider continuing use of the tool in combination with its own Personal Development Records, for example, although some further harmonisation of these forms could be undertaken to generate a better 'fit' (and also to make the current PDR slightly more robust in terms of question wording).

6.9.2 Measuring User Voice impact on re-offending

Some of our recommendations about future practice concern the collection of key data which could allow for the longer term illustration of positive cost-benefit User Voice impacts, but they also concern ways in which such material could be analysed and deployed in publicity or fund-raising material. Data could also be gathered over the longer term which could be used to underpin a study of impact on re-offending by User Voice participants. That was never designed to be a component of the current study (partly because a proper reconviction study always involves a time lag that is difficult to accommodate within evaluation periods, and partly because reconviction is not considered a useful measure of User Voice's activities). However, if individual data on User Voice participants were augmented with PNC data for example, it would be possible to measure change in offending across entire offending histories, and should also be possible to place any shifts alongside other data.

Recommendation 10: that User Voice continue to strengthen its data collection activities and review these in the light of the evaluation findings; in particular, fine-tuning the database, and incorporating data on re-offending. Some minor changes to data collection systems could also help the organisation to do its own costing work in the future.

6.10 FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF USER VOICE'S THEORY OF CHANGE

The research team has used the User Voice Theory of Change as a framework for understanding impact, and as a guide for key points where data collection would be needed. We could, however, identify a few areas where the existing Theory of Change could be augmented to take account of key factors which are currently missing. For example, a key part of the User Voice unique selling point is about what the organisation can bring to the work in terms of a strong familiarity with, and direct experience of, issues concerning criminal justice and those who experience the system and its related services. That knowledge is arguably part of what gives User Voice some of its causal efficacy, and part of what helps to bring about change.

It could also be stressed in the model that User Voice impacts are generated in a dynamic manner involving mutual interaction between different individuals and groups, and the services with which they are involved. Changes in the way in which service staff view and engage with service users are also closely linked both to the idea of 'service change' and to shifts in user perceptions about the legitimacy and responsiveness of services. These dynamic, mutually reinforcing and interactive aspects of User Voice delivery and changes could be captured through the addition of different kinds of connector symbols within the model.

Recommendation 11: that key User Voice staff re-visit its theory of change in the light of the evaluation findings, with a view to making decisions about possible amendments to that theory.

Service users and User Voice staff suggested a number of ways in which the Theory of Change outcomes could be further developed or strengthened, and how these might be better measured moving forward:

- **Engagement:** As noted throughout this report, engagement – at and between all levels – is key to Council success, and being perceived as a credible and legitimate model. Service users were initially motivated to engage with User Voice because it provided a distinct platform in which to meaningfully contribute to criminal justice service delivery. Participants were also motivated to work with ex-offenders in productive and constructive ways. Relationships and engagement between service providers and User Voice, and service providers and service users (via User Voice) were more complicated and could be further strengthened, as recommended above. Several User Voice staff suggested that 'team reflections might be useful' when initiating new projects or prior to a new council being developed: 'It would be helpful to get together and think about what worked, what didn't, and how we can overcome that ... We're all on tight schedules, and fire fighting a lot, but I think that would be massive... A good learning experience on how we can improve.' Reflecting on, and identifying best practice within the organisation (e.g. how best to engage, how to engage in different, and complex, service settings, etc.) may contribute to improved delivery strategies. For

evaluative purposes, creating strong relational links between User Voice, service providers, and service users could increase the likelihood for data sharing, data collection, longer-term follow-up, and partnerships to better understand how Council participation enables the desistance process.

- **Personal and skills development:** All Council participants identified at least one way in which they had developed personally (increased confidence and self-esteem, for example), and/or grew or strengthened skills like reading, writing, and computer competencies. Many of these inter/personal skills develop organically through the Council model via dialogic exchange, solution-focused teamwork, community-oriented betterment, and diplomacy. Many respondents suggested ways in which skills could be more directly (or explicitly) developed within the Council model. One of these suggestions was to create peer-led ‘support’ groups or classes within the community for other service users. For example, a computer basics class, budgeting, or a discussion group on how to negotiate life on the outside when you have a conviction. Such skills development could be measured and tracked over time with IOMIs or User Voice’s PDR tool (discussed earlier), further boosting the organisation’s ability to empirically demonstrate positive change.
- **Role modelling and peer support:** One of the most distinctive aspects of the User Voice model is the role of ex-offenders in service delivery, Council development and facilitation, and as role models to Council members. This was deeply valued by all Council participants. In addition, the formal and informal peer support gained from being part of the organisation gave members a sense of community, pride, and collective purpose. This Theory of Change outcome arguably had the most impact on service users. However, both User Voice staff and Council members indicated that there may be additional ways of enhancing this aspect of the model. All Council participants desired more training or information on ‘how to be a better mentor’. Community Council participants, in particular, expressed interest in more formal training around mentoring, managing crises and vulnerabilities, pro-social modelling, and listening skills. Many community respondents did not feel adequately prepared or equipped to handle difficult clients or difficult (resistant/combatative) probation staff. In some ways, this prevented confidence building, and made some feel vulnerable or incapable to professionally assist other service users. Nonetheless, all participants found the ‘informal’ (or tacit) aspects of peer support and access to role models (and role modelling) from User Voice to be beneficial and rewarding. For the future, User Voice may want to consider better combining the implicit and explicit aspects of mentoring and mentorship: formal trainings (and even certifications, as one Community Council member suggested) coupled with the embedded peer support already present within the organisation.
- **Active citizenship and desistance:** Becoming ‘active citizens’ played an important role to Council members in a variety of ways, and was directly linked to a positive, desistance-oriented change process. Participants’ descriptions of their Council experiences tapped into the fundamental characteristics of being a ‘good citizen’: helping others, bettering their environment or community, improving the quality of life for those around them, having a voice and choice, and mobilising others to contribute to the effort. Prison Council participants, in particular, made links between

becoming active in their prison community and how this might transfer (or translate) into post-release life. Many wanted to get involved in local politics or community initiatives on the outside, or become advocates or mentors to others in the criminal justice system. Forging more connections between custodial and community life (like throughcare support services, discussed above) might assist many of these participants in achieving their desires to be an 'active citizen' upon release. For several Community Council participants, engaging with 'legit people' was powerful, and made them feel 'legit' as well. One participant described the opportunities User Voice had afforded him by being invited to probation and political events, where he was able to listen and engage with high level people. His words sum up the significance and value of User Voice Councils:

It made me feel good, like I actually belonged there... I wasn't just a con, I was a person who had something important to say.

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